BROKEN BARRIERS

MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON

BROKEN BARRIERS
BEST LAID SCHEMES
THE MAN IN THE STREET
BLACKSHEEP! BLACKSHEEP!
LADY LARKSPUR
THE MADNESS OF MAY
THE VALLEY OF DEMOCRACY

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

BROKEN BARRIERS

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BY

MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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TO

RAY LONG

WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARD

AND IN TOKEN OF

THE OLD HOOSIER FELLOWSHIP

OF MONTGOMERY AND BOONE

BROKEN BARRIERS

BROKEN BARRIERS

CHAPTER ONE

I

As the train sped through the night Grace Durland decided that after all it didn't matter so much!

She had parted tearfully from the girls at the sorority house and equally poignant had been the goodbyes to her friends among the faculty; but now that it was all over she was surprised and a little mystified that she had so quickly recovered from her disappointment. Bitterness had welled in her heart at the first reading of her mother's letter calling her home. Her brother Roy, always the favored one, was to remain at the University to finish the law course, for which he had shown neither aptitude nor zeal, and this hurt a little. And they might have warned her of the impending crisis in the family fortunes before she left home to begin the fall term, only a month earlier.

But her resentment had passed. The spirit of adventure beat in her breast with strong insistent wing. With the fatalism of imaginative youth she was already assuring herself that some force beyond her control had caught her up and was bearing her on irresistibly.

She lay back at ease in her seat in the day coach, grateful that there were no acquaintances on the train to interrupt her reveries. She was twenty-

one, tall, slightly above medium height and bore every mark of sound health and wholesome living—a fair representative of the self-reliant American girls visible on the campus of all Mid-Western colleges. The excitement of her hasty packing and leave-taking had left a glow in her olive cheecks. Her hair, where it showed under her sport hat, was lustrous black; her eyes were brown, though in shadow they changed to jade,—variable, interesting eyes they were, that arrested attention by their quick play of emotion. They expressed her alert intelligence, her frank curiosity, her sympathetic and responsive nature.

When the train reached Indianapolis she left her trunk check with the transfer agent and boarded a street car. At Washington street, she transferred to the trolley line that ran down New York street, where the Durland home faced Military Park. New York street between the old canal and the western end of the park had once been a fashionable quarter of the town, and the old houses still stood though their glory of the Civil War time and the years immediately succeeding had departed. The Durlands lived in a big square brick house, set well back in a yard that rose a little above the street. The native forest trees in the lots all along the block added to the impression of age imparted by the houses themselves. Under the branches of the big walnut in the Durland front yard the neighborhood children of Grace's generation had gathered to play. The tree was identified with her earliest recollections; it had symbolized the stability of the home itself.

She pushed open the iron gate and hurried up the brick walk. Her ring brought her mother to the door, clutching a newspaper.

"Why, *Grace!* I had no *idea*——"

She caught the girl in her arms, then held her away, looked into her eyes and kissed her.

"I'm so sorry, dear! I know what it means to you. It's a terrible disappointment to all of us."

"Oh, I understand everything, mother."

"But I didn't expect you so soon. I don't see how you managed it. I thought you'd probably wait till Saturday."

"Oh, I couldn't have done that, mother."

"How's Roy? He didn't write at all last week."

"He's flourishing and sent his love to everybody. He promises to work harder than ever now."

"I'm sure he will. I know he was sorry to see you leave; he'd know what a wrench it would be for you."

They had been talking in the hall, with Grace's suitcase and tennis racket lying on the floor where she had dropped them. She pushed them out of the way at the foot of the old-fashioned stair that rose steeply just inside the door.

"Don't bother about your things now, Grace. Your father's in the sitting room and Ethel's up in the spare room sewing. Have you had your supper? There's some cold baked chicken in the ice-box and I can make you some hot tea."

"Oh, I had supper before I left, mother."

Mrs. Durland lifted her head and called her older daughter's name and from some remote place Ethel answered. Mrs. Durland was as dark as Grace, but cast in a larger mold, and while there were points of resemblance in their faces there was a masculine vigor in the mother that the girl lacked. Mrs. Durland's iron gray hair was brushed back smoothly from her low broad forehead. She wore an authoritative air, suggesting at once managerial capacity; a woman,

one would say, strongly independent in her thinking; self-assertive and obstinate, but of kind and generous impulses.

Grace was already in the sitting room, where she tip-toed up behind her father, who was absorbed in a book that he read as it lay on the table before him. His bent shoulders suggested that this was his habitual manner of managing a book. Grace passed her hands over his thick shock of disordered hair and patted his cheek; then bent and laid her face against his.

"Well, here I am, daddy!"

"Not home, Grace!" he exclaimed looking up at her bewilderedly. "They didn't tell me you were coming."

"I'm a surprise! Nobody knew I was coming tonight!"

"Well, well; I didn't know there was a train at this hour. It's nice to see you, Grace."

He turned to the open volume with an absent confused air, as though uncertain whether anything further was expected of him, then pushed his chair back from the table. Mrs. Durland had come in, followed quickly by Ethel carrying a work-basket and a blouse that she had been at work on when interrupted by the announcement of her sister's arrival.

Ethel was twenty-seven, an indefinite blonde, and not so tall as Grace. Her mother said that she was a Durland, specifically like one of her husband's sisters in Ohio, a person for whom Mrs. Durland had never evinced any great liking. Mrs. Durland was a Morley and the Morleys were a different stock, with the Kentucky background so precious in the eyes of many Indianians. Mrs. Durland's father had been a lawyer of small attainments in a southern Indiana

county, but it was in her grandfather Josiah B. Morley, who sat in the Constitutional Convention of 1851, and was later a speaker of the Indiana house of representatives, that her pride concentrated. She had married Durland in Rangerton, where as a young man he had begun with Isaac Cummings the manufacture of a few mechanical specialties, removing shortly to Indianapolis with a number of Durland's inventions and Cummings's small capital as the foundation of their fortune.

"Things have changed some since you left, Grace. And I'm sorry you had to quit school," Durland was saying, while Ethel, having greeted her sister, sat down by the smoldering coal fire and resumed her sewing.

"It's all right, father," said Grace, who had taken off her hat and coat. "I came back as soon as I got the news so you and mother would know it's all right with me. We're all going to put up a cheerful front, no matter what happens."

"Of course we've all got to do that," murmured Ethel without looking up.

"It's hard on you children," said Durland. "It's all my fault; I've got nobody to blame but myself, Grace. Cummings always seemed willing for me to go on as I did for twenty years, trying to improve on the old patents and develop new ideas. But ideas don't come as fast as they used to. I guess he thought he'd got everything I was ever likely to have to offer."

"It was certainly unkind, after all the years you'd been together. But I don't believe for a minute your work's done. You'll strike something bigger than any of your old inventions."

"That's what I've been telling father," said Ethel.

"A man who's spent years inventing things is likely to find something big any time. Of course, without the shop father can't work as well, but he's going to have a shop of his own."

"Oh, that's fine, father!" exclaimed Grace. "Where is the new place going to be?"

"It's not much of a place," Durland answered apologetically. "I rented a little room in the Billings Power Building and am going to run a pattern and model shop. I hope to get enough work right away to pay the rent.

"I'm sure you will. Everybody who knows anything about the machinery business knows you're the inventor of the only good things Cummings-Durland make."

"They've changed the name of the company now," Ethel remarked. "They've cut father's name out."

"They changed the name in reorganizing the company," Durland explained patiently in his colorless tone. "I had some loans the bank wouldn't carry any longer; stock I put up as collateral had to be sold and Cummings bought it."

"A man who will do a thing like that will be punished for it; he won't prosper," said Ethel in a curious, strained voice.

Durland frowned at his older daughter. Evidently her remark was distasteful to him; he found no consolation in the prediction that unseen powers would punish Cummings for his perfidy.

"I'd probably have done the same thing if I'd been in his place. Everything he turned down—my new ideas, I mean—proved to be no good when I put my own money into 'em on the side. You've got to be fair about it."

It was clear that he set great store by the new shop.

The fact that he still had a place to work preserved his self-respect. With a place in which to continue his experiments he was not utterly condemned to the scrap heap. He lifted his head and his jaws tightened. Grace noted with pity these manifestations of a resurgence of his courage. His laborious life, his few interests outside the shop or more accurately the private laboratory he had maintaned for years in a corner of the Cummings-Durland plant; his evenings at home poring over scientific books and periodicals; his mild unquestioning assent to everything his wife proposed with reference to family affairs, all had their pathos. She had always been aware that he had a fondness for her that was not shared by Roy and Ethel. Grace imagined that it was a disappointment to her father that Roy had not manifested a mechanical bent. In his gentle, unassertive fashion, Durland had tried to curb the lad's proneness to seek amusement, to skimp his lessons—this in Roy's high school days; but Mrs. Durland had always been quick to defend Roy; in her eyes he could do no wrong.

Ethel and her father were almost equally out of sympathy. Ethel was intensely religious, zealous in attendance upon a down-town church, a teacher in its Sunday school and active in its young people's society. While Mrs. Durland had long been a member of a West End church she was not particularly religious; she believed there was good in all churches; but she was proud of Ethel's prominence in a church whose membership was recruited largely from the prosperous. Ethel was on important committees and she was now and then a delegate to conventions of church workers in other cities; the pastor called upon her frequently and she had been asked to dinner at the houses of wealthy members of the congregation,

though usually some church business inspired the invitation. In a day when the frivolity of the new generation was a subject of general lamentation, Ethel could be pointed to as a pattern of sobriety and rectitude. Durland had ceased going to church shortly after his marriage and his wife had accounted to his children for his apostacy on the ground of his scientific learnings. He never discussed religion; indeed, he rarely debated any question that rose in the family.

Mrs. Durland came bustling in carrying an apron which she was hemstitching and the talk at once became more animated.

"The Cummings are in their new house on Washington Boulevard, Grace. They've left the house on Meridian they bought when they moved away from here. They haven't sold their place; they've leased it for ninety-nine years to an automobile company. We're the only people on this block who were here when your father bought this house."

Ethel and her mother engaged in a long discussion of the Cummings family, not neglecting to abuse Isaac Cummings for his ungenerous conduct in dropping Durland from the business. Meanwhile Durland crossed and recrossed his short thin legs to express his impatience or disapproval. Nothing interested him less than the Cummings family history; and his elimination from the old company was a closed incident.

"Bob Cummings's wife is certainly a pretty woman," continued Ethel. "She's very popular, too. You see her name nearly every day in the society column. Bob was always so quiet; I wonder how he likes being dragged about so much."

"I shall always think," remarked Mrs. Durland expansively, "that if the Cummings hadn't moved away

when they did Bob and Grace might—well, I always thought he liked you particularly, Grace, and you were fond of him. Of course, he's five years older, but when you were still in high school and he was in Yale he always came to see you and took you places when he was home. But when they moved away everything changed."

"Oh, that didn't amount to anything, mother," Grace replied carelessly. "He was always shy as a boy and I suppose he still is. After they moved away he didn't know the girls out there so he hung on to me for a while. He just used me to cover up his diffidence among strange young people at country club dances, and other places where he didn't know many people. When he got acquainted out there he didn't need me any more."

"It would be like Hetty Cummings to tell him he'd better cut his West End friends," said Mrs. Durland tartly. "Even back in Rangerton she was always setting up to be better than most folks. It must have been in their minds when they moved away that they were going to force your father out of the business and burn all the old bridges."

"The canal bridge," remarked Grace with a little laugh which the others ignored.

"Now, Allie," said Durland in mild protest, "they didn't force me out. It was losing my stock in the company that put me out."

"It was merciless," said Ethel, her voice rising, "Cummings took advantage of you. He always knew you were not a business man. Everything he's got came through your genius."

"I guess he thought my genius was worn out,—and he may be right about it," said Durland.

"Don't be so foolish, daddy," said Grace gently.

"Any day you may have an inspiration that will be worth a lot of money."

"It's always possible, of course," said Mrs. Durland with a little sigh susceptible of the interpretation that she had no great confidence in her husband's further inspirations. "Ethel," she continued, "tell Grace about your work."

"Yes, please do, sis," said Grace.

"Well, I've just begun," Ethel replied primly. "I don't know much about it myself. I'm in the Gregg and Burley company; they're one of the biggest insurance agencies in town. Mr. Burley's been ever so nice to me. His little girl's in my Sunday-school class. Mrs. Burley asked me to a birthday party they had for Louise last summer, so I really feel that I know the family. I'm handling the telephone calls and doing other little things till I get the run of the office. I've started at eighteen a week but Mr. Burley says they'll raise me just as soon as I'm worth more. There are six other girls in the office and one who's been there ten years get fifty a week and I don't see how they ever could get along without her. She knows more about the details of the business than the members of the firm."

"That sounds good," said Grace warmly. "I suppose there are women in business here who make large salaries, far more than high school teachers or teachers in colleges."

"I never thought my girls would have to battle for their bread," said Mrs. Durland. "I've always clung to the old-fashioned idea that girls should stay with their mothers till they married. Of course thousands of splendid girls are at work in every kind of business, but it's hard for me to get used to it."

"I don't see why women shouldn't work if they need to or want to," said Grace, "I think that's one of the

things that's settled; women can do anything they please these days."

"I can't bring myself to see it," Mrs. Durland replied, "I remember that it seemed queer when my father employed a woman stenographer in his office."

"Well, times have changed, mother," Grace remarked. "I have an idea that I can sell things; I read an article in a magazine about the psychology of salesmanship, and I have a strong hunch that that would be a good field for me. The big stores must be taking on more help at this season. I think I'll see what the chances are."

"Grace, surely you're not in earnest!" cried Mrs. Durland. "Of course we will need your help, but it would be a lot better, considering your education, for you to take up teaching or go into an office as Ethel's doing. It's so much more in keeping with your bringing up. It would break my heart to see you behind a counter!"

Durland shifted uncomfortably in his chair as the matter was discussed. For years he had lived his own life, his thoughts centered constantly upon mechanical projects. He was now confronted by the fact that as the result of his intense preoccupation with tools, metals and wood and his inattention and incapacity in business he was hardly a factor in family affairs. He listened almost as though he were a stranger in a strange house, his guilt heavy upon him. He started when Grace addressed him directly.

"Well, daddy, don't you think I'm right about trying my arts of persuasion as a saleslady? I've always loved that word! I think it would be fascinating."

"You make it sound interesting," said Durland cautiously, after a timid glance at his wife. "I want you to know it hurts me to think that you girls have got to go to work. But as long as it can't be helped I want

you to do the best you can for yourselves. You ought to be sure you get into something where you'll have a chance to forward yourself."

"Yes, daddy," said Grace kindly. "I want to make my time count. If I'm going to be a business woman I mean to play the game for all I'm worth."

"I simply couldn't be reconciled to having you in a store," said Mrs. Durland. "An office would be much more dignified."

"I guess Grace can take care of herself," Durland ventured.

"Of course!" replied Mrs. Durland quickly, "we can trust our girls anywhere. I was only thinking of the annoyances. I've seen girls humiliated by floor-walkers—right before customers, and it always makes me boil. And I'm ashamed to say there are women who are perfectly hateful to the clerks who wait on them."

"Well, who's afraid!" said Grace cheerfully. "School teachers have a hard time too, with principals and supervisors pecking at them all the time. Now that I'm going out into the world I'm not going to ask any special favors because I'm a woman. The day for that's all passed."

"And it's a pity it's so!" declared Mrs. Durland.

"Oh, mother, I'm for taking the world as I find it!" She glanced laughingly at her father who smiled at her approvingly. In his undemonstrative way he was relieved that Grace was meeting the family misfortunes so bravely. His courage was strengthened by her very presence in the house. Prematurely aged as he was, he rejoiced in her youth, her radiant vitality, her good humor and high spirits. He followed her with admiring eyes as she moved about the room. She bent for a moment over the book he had been reading, asked questions about it, drawing him

out as to its nature and merits. He was as happy as a boy when a sympathetic grown-up manifests an intelligent interest in his toys.

"I hope you won't be in too much of a hurry about going to work, Grace," said Mrs. Durland. "It's a serious matter for you and all of us. Perhaps Ethel could make some suggestions. Some of her church friends might be able to help you."

"I shall be glad to do anything I can," Ethel murmured without looking up from her sewing.

"Oh, thanks; I'll certainly call on you if I see any place where you can help. I've been thinking about it ever since I got mother's letter, and I believe I'll call up Irene Kirby right now and make an appointment to see her tomorrow. She's been in Shipley's ever since she left high school."

"Now, Grace, please don't do that," protested Mrs. Durland, "you must take time to consider your future. Irene's people are very ordinary and I never liked your intimacy with her when you went to school together."

"Why, mother, Irene's one of the finest girls I ever knew! She was a good student in high school and certainly behaved herself. She can tell me all about Shipley's and the chances of getting in there."

"I don't like it at all, Grace," replied Mrs. Durland. "It's bad enough having my daughters going down town to work but I'd hate having you ask favors of a girl like Irene Kirby. I don't see why you can't wait a little and let Ethel help you find something more suitable."

"But it won't do any harm to see Irene and talk to her."

They heard her voice at the telephone in the hall and caught scraps of her lively talk with Irene.

"Grace is so headstrong," Mrs. Durland sighed.

"And you never can tell how anything's going to strike her. I'm always amazed at her inconsistencies. She's the last girl in the world you'd think would want to work in a department store. She isn't that type at all. Stephen, I wish you'd put your foot down."

Durland looked at his wife blankly, trying to recall any other instance where he had been asked to put his foot down. If he had been a man of mirth he might have laughed.

"Grace ain't going to do anything foolish; you can trust Grace," he said.

"What did Irene say?" asked Ethel when Grace came back from the telephone.

"Oh, I am going to have lunch with her tomorrow at the store and she'll tell me everything," said Grace carelessly. "Well, daddy, it's about time for the regular evening apple."

There was a plate of apples on the table with a knife beside it, and Durland, pleased that she remembered his habit of eating an apple before going to bed, took one she chose for him and peeled it with care, tossing the unbroken peeling into the grate.

II

As Grace and her mother washed the dishes and made the beds the next morning Mrs. Durland recurred to the ill fortune that had brought Grace home from the university. Repetition was a habit with her, and she explained again and with more detail the manner in which Cummings had thrust her husband out of Cummings-Durland. She praised the spirit in which Ethel had met the situation—all this as a prelude to another plea that Grace should plan her future with

care and not take the first employment that offered. One of these days the right man would come along and she would marry; Mrs. Durland hoped that both her daughters would marry good men and keep up the traditions of the American home.

"Oh, I've never felt that I'd marry," Grace replied. "The reason I went to college was to fit myself to be something in the world; and now that I've got to begin over again I'm going to experiment a little. I may try a lot of things before I find something that suits me."

"Well, Grace, you know I've done the best I could for all you children. When my time comes to go I want to know that you are all happy and well placed in life."

"Yes, mother; you've been wonderful to all of us. And I want you to be sure I'm not bitter about anything. You and father have always done the best you could for us."

It was a clear, crisp morning and Grace decided to walk the short distance to the business district. Her buoyant step expressed her lightness of spirit; never had she felt so well, never had she been so sure of herself. She was convinced that it was only her pride that had suffered in the sudden termination of her college life and that the blow was not to any lofty ideal that she had erected for herself. The thought of freedom fascinated her. Her mother's constant lament that the world was not what it used to be and that the change was not all for the better only piqued her curiosity. While the university had thrown its protecting arm about her she had not thought of perils or dangers; they were only the subject of tedious warnings by pessimists who had despaired of youth in all ages. But now that she had been thrust into the

world she refused to be appalled by hints of unseen dangers; the fact that they were only hints, intimations, vague insinuations, only increased her incredulity while creating a wonder in her mind as to their exact nature. She was afraid of nothing; dared everything.

A car screeched discordantly as it negotiated a turn on its way into the interurban station. She noted the faces of the passengers at the windows—country folk and small town people—and felt her comradeship with them. She had once heard the president of the university say that the state was like a big neighborhood of cheerful, industrious, aspiring people, and the thought pleased her.

To Grace the capital city of her native state was merely an aggregation of three hundred and some odd thousand people. The rust-colored dome of the State House and the majestic shaft of the Soldier's and Sailor's Monument connoted history and implied changes that were to influence and affect her as a child of the commonwealth; but she was only vaguely conscious of them. It was her fate to become an active member of the community at a time when elderly citizens, who professed to believe that nothing had changed since the last wild turkey was shot within the town's original mile square, found themselves walking from the postoffice to the old Bates House site without meeting a single acquaintance. The languor that for years gave Indianapolis a half-southern air was gone. Here indeed was abundant material for the student of change.

Still a sprawling country town at the end of the Civil War, Indianapolis was booming gaily when the panic of '73 punished it for its temerity. The few conservative capitalists who patiently sawed wood while

the bubbles were bursting had money to invest when the Eastern insurance companies began foreclosing their mortgages on the best corners. Such banks as survived established new low records of refrigeration. Newcomers, stupidly desirous of initiating new enterprises, were chilled by their reception. Melancholy recollections of the panic of '73 were long a sufficient excuse for restricted credits. Not going to take any chances! As a matter of fact they never had taken any, those cautious souls, and in the trail of the whirlwind they had gathered enough spoil to enrich themselves a thousand fold. Stinginess nobly standardized by a few merely, one might think, that the generous of hand and spirit might shine the more effulgently. The town got by the pinching times of '84 and '93 and continued to grow right along until the automobile craze arrived with a resulting multiplication of smokestacks. With the old guard, and such portions of a new generation as had been intimidated by its caution, sitting in pigeon-toed fear predicting calamity, the growth persisted.

Prosperity began to wear strange faces; the old-timers didn't know the new people or pretended they didn't. Many of these new folk who rolled over the asphalt in large expensive limousines didn't go to church at all. A singular thing. Once it hadn't been respectable to abstain from church. Spectacle of perfectly good citizens riding gaily to the country clubs on Sunday morning without fear of eternal damnation. Churches moving uptown, or those that clung to their old sites trying valiantly to adjust themselves to changing spiritual needs.

Sentiment—oodles and scads of sentiment about the town and its people! Visitors expected to confess that here throbs a different atmosphere—an ampler ether, a

diviner air. Politics, no end. Statesmen and stateswomen everywhere visible. Families torn asunder by the battles of the primaries. A political bomb hidden under the socks in every darning basket. The fine arts not neglected. An honest interest, dating back to the founders, in bookish things; every mail box a receptacle for manuscript. Riley in Lockerbie street thrumming his lyre with the nation for audience.

No reason why anyone should go friendless or stray from the straight and narrow path in a town so solidly based on the ten commandments, except that the percentage of the wayward seems bound to grow with a mounting population, particularly when the biggest war in all creation comes along and jars most disturbingly all the props of civilization. Changes! Changes of course, not local as to cause and effect, but part of the general onward sweep of the Time-Spirit impelled by gasoline to jazzy music.

In so far as she paid any attention to the talk about changes that she had heard at home and at the university, Grace believed it was all for good; that it was well to be done with hypocrisy, cant, prudishness; that a frank recognition of evil rather than an attempt to cloak it marked a distinct advance. When she was about nine her mother had rebuked her severely for using the word leg; a leg was a limb and not vulgarly to be referred to as a leg. The use of leg when leg was meant was still considered vulgar by fairly broadminded folk in the corn belt, probably as late as 1906—if one may attempt to fix a date for so momentous a matter.

Grace Durland was no more responsible for the changes going on about her than her parents had been for the changes of their day. They had witnessed the passing of the hoop-skirt and red flannel underwear,

the abandonment of the asafetida bag as a charm against infection, and other follies innumerable. Boys and girls had once stolen down the back stairs or brazenly lied to gain an evening of freedom; now the only difference was that they demanded—and received—a key to the front door. Civilization will hardly go to smash over the question of a girl's refusal to wear a corset or her insistence on her right to roll her stockings. The generation of Grace Durland isn't responsible for changes that began the day after creation and started all over again after the flood and will continue right on to the end of all things.

III

The last of a number of errands she had undertaken for her mother brought Grace to Shipley's a little before twelve. She observed the young women who waited on her with a particular attention inspired by the feeling that she too might soon be standing behind a counter. Some of the clerks at Shipley's were women well advanced in middle life, whom she remembered from her earliest visits to the establishment. These veterans contributed to Shipley's reputation for solidity and permanence. They enjoyed the friendly acquaintance of many customers, who relied upon their counsel in their purchases. There were many more employees of this type in Shipley's than in any other establishment in town; they were an asset, a testimony to the consideration shown the employees, the high character of the owners. Grace's imagination played upon her own future: what if she should find herself in ten or twenty years behind a counter, ambition and hope dead in her and nothing ahead but

the daily exhibition of commodities and the making out of sale slips!

But this cloud was only the tiniest speck on her horizon. She had already set a limit upon the time she would spend in such a place if her services were accepted; it was the experience she wanted, and when she had exhausted the possibilities of Shipley's or some similar place she meant to carry her pitcher of curiosity to other fountains.

While waiting for Irene outside the lunch room she found amusement in watching the shoppers, studying them, determining their financial and social status. Some one had told her that she was endowed with special gifts for appraising character, and she had the conceit of her inexperience as a student of the human kind. Her speculations as to the passers-by were interrupted by the arrival of Irene.

"It's perfectly wonderful to see you again! I was that delighted to hear your voice over the wire last night. You're looking marvelous! I always adored your gypsy effect! Come along—there's a particular table in a far corner they keep for me and we can buzz for just one hour."

She had put on her coat and hat, to disguise the fact, she explained, that she was one of Shipley's hired hands. She was a tall blonde, with a wealth of honey-colored hair, china blue eyes and a clear brilliant complexion. Grace's admiration, dating from high school days, quickened as she noted the girl's ease and the somewhat scornful air with which she inspected the lunch card. Irene's father was a locomotive engineer and the family lived in a comfortable house on a pleasant street in the East End, not far from the railway shops. Irene had brothers and sisters, but they did not share her good looks or her social

qualities. Irene met the rest of the world with a lofty condescension which fell short of being insufferable only by reason of her good humor. Selfishness with Irene was almost a virtue, it manifested itself so candidly. She had no intention of being bored, or of putting herself out. Ugliness and clumsiness were repugnant to her. Disagreeable things did not trouble her because she had schooled herself not to see them. She was clever, adroit, resourceful, and wise with the astonishing worldly-wisdom that is the heritage of the children of the Twentieth Century. In school she had been a fair scholar but the grand manner and a ready wit had assisted her even there. When puzzled by Irene's ability to dress better than most of her girl companions in the high school, Grace had been impressed by the revelation that Irene made her own clothes and could retouch last year's hat with a genius that brought it into conformity with the latest and most exclusive designs.

"You still have the same queenly look, Irene," Grace remarked.

"Queenly nothing! You're nearly as tall as I am and I haven't a thing on you when it comes to hauteur. I suppose the Lord made me tall and gave me square shoulders just to hang clothes on for women with money to look at. I wish I had your black hair. Being a blonde is an awful handicap if you're doomed to work for a living. And a complexion like mine, which is called good by experts, is a nuisance. I've refused an offer about once a month to go on the road selling and demonstrating cosmetics. Can you see me?"

"I supposed you'd be married before this, Irene. You must have had loads of chances."

"Chances but not opportunities," replied Irene with a shrug. Don't tell me you've quit college to get

married; it's not a professor, I hope! I'd hate to see you sacrificing yourself in the noble cause of education."

"Nothing like that. I quit because we're broke—father couldn't afford to keep me in college any longer. Some one had to drop out and as Roy has only a year more in the law school it seemed better for him to keep on."

"Roy?" Irene repeated the name languidly as though Roy were a negligible figure in the affairs of the Durlands.

"My brother," said Grace.

"Oh, yes!" Irene's eyes lighted as with some memory. "Oh, yes—brothers do rather have the best of it, don't they? But it's too bad you couldn't finish. You're just the type of girl that ought to be rounded out at college."

"Oh, it's all right; I'm rather glad to be free."

"Well, I'd dreamed of seeing you land high as a writer or something like that. I'll hand you this right now: women can't know too much these days. It's a big advantage to a woman to know how to talk to men; I don't mean the pool room boys but the real men—the men who draw the large mazuma. They have the brains themselves and they respect the same ingredient in girls, a lot of silly ideas to the contrary notwithstanding. Just by knowing Thackeray I'm the assistant manager of the ready-to-wear department of this spacious emporium—the youngest assistant in the house. Funny, but it's true!"

Asked for an elucidation of the statement, Irene explained that the general superintendent of Shipley's, who had power of life and death over everything pertaining to the establishment, was Thackeray-mad. Learning this she had carelessly referred to "Becky

Sharp" in a chance conversation with him in the elevator on a day when he deigned to notice her. In a week she had been called to his office and promoted.

"Oh, don't imagine he was leading up to anything; he's a gentleman with a wife and three children and teaches a Sunday-school class. But he yearns to talk to some one—any one who has a scrap of interest in Thackeray. His wife invited me to their house for Sunday dinner awhile back and I was never so bored in my life. But I did manage to show an intelligent interest in his library, so I guess I'll hold my job."

Irene had finished at the high school two years before Grace, but the difference in their ages was not to be calculated in years. Irene had always seemed to Grace to be endowed with the wisdom of all the centuries.

"About those correspondence courses, Grace," Irene was saying, "I've had most of the stuff on the schedule of that English course I wrote you about. I wouldn't read Carlyle's 'Heroes and Hero-worship' again for a farm in Texas."

"Or Bacon's 'Novum Organum'," groaned Grace.

"Well—I'm concentrating on French. You know I had French in high school, and I'm keeping it up in the hope the house will send me to Paris next year. You know Shipley's is one of the most progressive houses in the whole west; they certainly do treat you white."

"Mother's not wildly enthusiastic about my going into a store. You know mother; she thinks——"

"I know," Irene caught her up, "she thinks it's not as respectable as working in an office or teaching a kindergarten. I met Ethel on the street the other day and she told me she'd taken a place with an insurance firm. That's all right for Ethel but no good

for you. I looked over the office game before I decided to come here and there's nothing to it, my dear. You can make a good thing of this if you have selling talent. My salary is nothing to speak of but I get a bonus—I drew seventy-five dollars last week and I expect to hit the hundred mark before Christmas. They steer the customers who look like real money to me. When you've learned the trick you can make them think it's a disgrace not to buy the highest priced thing we carry. The women from the country towns whose husbands have grabbed the water power on 'Possum creek or foreclosed on ninety per cent of the farmers in the township, bring said husbands along and they are the easiest. I throw the wrap or whatever it is on my own stately person, then clap it on the wife and hubby doesn't dare let his wife suspect he doesn't think her as much of a Venus de Milo as I am! A modest little violet!"

"Oh, Irene!" cried Grace, enchanted with her friend's wisdom.

She marveled at Irene's poise, and envied her the light ironic flick she gave to the business of bargain and sale. Irene complained in the most ladylike manner of the chicken salad, which Grace had thought very good. The head-waitress listened respectfully and offered to substitute something else, but Irene declined, with the indifference of one to whom petty annoyances are merely incidental and to be mentioned merely for the good of the service.

As they ate their chocolate eclairs Grace became impatient to broach the matter of her own ambition to become a factor in Shipley's, but it seemed a pity to break in upon Irene, who went on tranquilly discussing their old companions of high school days. Presently, after paying the checks, she brought her wrist

watch within range of her eyes with a graceful gesture, and disposed of the matter with characteristic ease.

"I've spoken to Miss Lupton—she manages our employment bureau—about you. She's a very good friend of mine; and I mentioned you to Miss Boardman, the head of my department. I didn't wait to ask where you'd rather be; but of course I'd like to have you with me. I can't just see you in the toilet goods or infants' wear. They're pretty full in all departments, but I think I've got you fixed."

"Oh, Irene——"

"All you do is to fill out an application blank—they always require that—and give two references. You've had no experience, but your figure and general intelligence will more than balance that. They do their best to keep the standard high and it won't be lost on them that you're of good family and have taken a whirl at college."

"I'm certainly obliged to you, Irene. I didn't know it would be as easy as this—but"—she laughed, "they haven't seen me yet!"

"Don't fish! Your appearance is nothing to complain of; you know that as well as I do. It will be fine to have you where we can talk and play together as we did in school. Between us we ought to be able to give tone to our end of the shop!"

IV

Miss Lupton received Grace amiably, asked her a few questions, and pushed a blank toward her.

"We always require this; it's just a matter of routine," she explained, and as Grace filled in the blank she looked at Irene and nodded her approval of the candidate.

Miss Boardman, a woman of forty, short, plump and brisk in manner and speech, surveyed Grace with full appreciation, remarking that Miss Kirby had covered all the details.

"We'll be ready for you Monday morning," she said. Then she directed Irene's attention to a lady who had, she explained, inspected all the garments in the shop and still lingered, a prey to uncertainty. "Miss Flagg doesn't seem to be getting anywhere with that woman. It's a Mrs. Bascomb from up in the state somewhere—Muncie or Anderson, or maybe Delphi. She's a new customer and the fussiest person I ever saw. Maybe you can help Miss Flagg, Miss Kirby, but be careful not to rattle her. Very glad to know you, Miss Durland. You will begin at twelve fifty; Miss Kirby will explain about the bonuses and other little things."

"Watch me work," said Irene, her eyes upon Miss Flagg's customer. "You can sit right here."

Without taking off her coat and hat Irene walked toward the customer and clerk who were evidently in a hopeless deadlock. Grace saw the slight gesture with which Irene signalled to Miss Flagg. The import of the signal was evidently that Miss Flagg was to continue her attentions to the lady from Muncie, Anderson or Delphi while Irene idly examined the garments heaped on a table, with which Miss Flagg had been tempting her difficult shopper. Irene picked out a coat, held it at arm's length, and slipped it on. Walking to a glass she passed back and forth the better to observe the effect of the garment upon her own person.

Miss Flagg's customer became interested, watching Irene enviously, and the moment the girl divested herself of the garment she took it up. The lady from

Muncie, Anderson or Delphi exchanged a few words with Irene; and again Irene put on the coat. Irene was soon discussing with her the merits of other raiment which Miss Flagg produced from the show cabinets. Grace watched intently, hearing nothing of the talk of the trio, but interpreting the pantomime. Irene had evidently assumed the role of adviser in the delicate matter of the lady's choice. Presently she took off her hat, disclosing the fact that she was a member of the selling staff of the establishment. Two gowns having been added to the wrap and the lady from the more northern provinces having been escorted to the fitting room, Irene returned to Grace.

"Six hundred dollars worth," she said, flicking a raveling from her sleeve. "I'll stay on the job till she's given her shipping order. Miss Flagg is one of our best saleswomen; but she just didn't hit it off with that woman. They were both tired and irritating each other. If I'd butted in and taken her away from Miss Flagg that would have spoiled everything. I saved the day by pretending I wasn't interested in her at all; but now she knows I belong here and she wants me to come back to the fitting room and make sure her things are all right. All she needed was a little coaxing and the right kind of flattery. You'd better not wait unless you want to watch the show a while. There's a convention of women's clubs in town and we're likely to be rushed this afternoon."

"I'll run along," said Grace. "And thank you ever so much."

On her way to the elevator she passed a clerk who was patiently answering the questions of a captious customer as to the merits of a garment.

"I don't know about this," said the woman pecking

at the silk lining in the sleeve; "it looks cheap."

"What's the difference, lady," exclaimed the girl, "nobody's going to notice the lining."

Grace smiled. The girl's phrase fastened itself in her memory. "What's the difference, lady?" It was susceptible of many interpretations and applications not related to suits that sold for $19.50.

She left the store elated, feeling herself already an essential unit of Shipley's. The great lower room seemed larger than when she had entered. She went into the book department and idled over the counters, opening volumes that roused her interest. She had no intention of relinquishing her interest in bookish things. She would test life, probe into the heart of things, but she would hold fast to all that she had gained in her two years at the university. She had been impressed by what the worldly-wise Irene had said of the value of a little learning in getting on. She meant to propose to her friend that they attack French together; and there were many lines of reading she intended to pursue with a view to covering the more important cultural courses which she had been obliged to abandon. Grace rejoiced in her sense of freedom; she was tremendously sure of herself.

When she reached home her mother was leaving for the first fall meeting of the West End Literary Club which had held together for years in spite of the deterioration of the neighborhood. Mrs. Durland made much of her loyalty to the organization, of which she had been the founder. While her old friends had dropped out when they moved away she thought it her duty to fill up the membership with new arrivals in the neighborhood. Women needed the inspiration of just such a society. She had enrolled a number of young married women, some of them hardly more

than transients domiciled in boarding houses, with a view to keeping them in touch with the best thought of the world. Ethel, sharing her mother's interest in all movements and devices for uplift, had acted as her scout in discovering these recruits.

"Well, Grace, I hope—" Mrs. Durland began, gathering up a number of magazines she was carrying to the meeting.

"I've done gone and done it, mother! I go to work at Shipley's Monday morning."

"I was afraid you would," said Mrs. Durland with a sigh. "You're so headstrong, Grace. With a little patience we'd have found something more suitable—more in keeping——"

"Well, I may not like it. If I don't I'll change to something else, so please don't worry about it."

Mrs. Durland had mislaid a glove; the loss of it overshadowed immediately her daughter's grievous error in accepting employment in a department store. Grace found the glove and held the magazines while her mother drew it on.

"The old security, the reticences and decencies of life have passed," said Mrs. Durland. Grace suspected that her mother was quoting from a magazine article or a club paper. She declined an urgent invitation to go to the meeting; she wanted to look over her clothes, she said.

"I hope you'll not give up your interest in literature now that you're going to work. You should save a little time every day for self-culture. There are some new books on that line I want you to read. I sometimes think the poorer we are the more we lean on the things of the spirit."

"I've already decided to do some studying," said Grace, who at the moment didn't feel the need of lean-

ing on anything. She was relieved that her mother, preoccupied with the club meeting, had so lightly passed over the matter of her engagement at Shipley's.

"If I'm not back at five-thirty, put on that pot-roast," said Mrs. Durland from the door. "It's all fixed in the ice box. And if that collector comes about the coal bill tell him I'll call at the office the next time I'm down town. That last load we had was full of slate and I'm not going to pay the bill till they make it right."

CHAPTER TWO

I

"I MUSTN'T seem to be too much interested in you," said Irene when Grace reported for duty at Shipley's on Monday morning. "I can't play favorites and it wouldn't do to make the other girls jealous. The first few days everything will seem strange but all you have to do is to stand around and keep your eyes open. Be nice to everybody—that's the card to play. One girl in a department can make all the rest uncomfortable. Miss Boardman's a little sharp sometimes—but never talk back! She knows her business and prides herself on keeping away ahead of her quota of sales. The management is strong for *esprit de corps* and there's a social club that's supposed to promote that sort of thing. There'll be a few dances during the winter and a theatre party and a few little things like that. You won't mind them. They're really good fun."

Grace was number eighteen. Her investiture with a number was the only real shock she experienced in taking her place in Shipley's. One of her new associates who was instructing her in the routine, which began with inspection of the stock, tightening of buttons, the repair of minor damages incurred in the handling of garments, addressed her casually as "Eighteen" as though that had been Grace's name bestowed in baptism. For an instant Grace resented her numerical designation; it was almost as though she had been robbed of her identity. Miss Boardman had given her a quick looking over to satisfy herself that the new employee met the store's requirements as to raiment. She

nodded her approval of the frock of dark taffeta which Grace had worn to simple afternoon affairs at college and told her to watch the other girls and lend a hand where she could.

Miss Boardman was beyond question a person of strong executive talent. Though burdened with much desk work as the head of the department, nothing escaped her watchful eye on the floor confided to her care. By eleven o'clock the ready-to-wear presented a scene of greatest animation. The day was fine and a throng of out-of-town customers, lured by double page advertisements of fall apparel in the newspapers, were attacking the department in dauntless battalions. Grace was constantly on the alert, keeping the much-examined stock in order, conducting customers to the trying-on room, and otherwise making herself useful to the experienced clerks.

A spectacled old lady fortified with a handbag appeared and surveyed the scene of confusion with dismay.

"Eighteen, see what that lady wants," said Miss Boardman as she hurried by.

"What is it, please, that I can show you?" asked Grace, feeling her heart thump as she realized that she had accosted her first customer. She smiled encouragingly and the old lady returned the smile.

"I want two suits—a gray and a blue, cut as nearly like this thing I have on as possible. I've written my exact measurements on this card, so don't jump at me with a tape-line. And I want a plain long coat for rough weather—something serviceable and unfashionable. You *look* like an intelligent girl, so I don't expect you to show me anything in red or green. And don't tell me what they're wearing in Paris, London or New York—, as though *I* cared! I pay cash,

so there'll be no time lost in looking up my credit card."

Grace placed a chair for her singular customer, took hurried counsel of Irene and was soon in the throes of her first sale. The little old lady asked few questions but her inquiries were much to the point.

"Show me only good quality," she said, tossing aside a skirt after asking its price. "You know perfectly well it can't be wool for that money, and the color, will run the first time it gets rained on."

"This," began Grace, "is genuine home-spun, hand-wove——"

"That's better. This will do for the blue. Find a gray of similar style."

The gray was more difficult than the blue. She hadn't wanted a mixed weave but a plain gray, which was not in stock. Grace warmed to her work, praising the quality of a gray with a misty heather mixture. Holding the coat at arm's length and becoming eloquent as to the fine quality of the garment, Grace turned to find the customer regarding her with a whimsical smile.

"My dear child, you do that very well. How long have you been here?" she demanded.

Grace colored. "This is my first day," she confessed. The old lady seemed greatly amused at her discomfiture. Her alert eyes brightened behind her glasses.

"Am I your first customer? Well, you're going to get on. You've made me change my mind and not many people ever do that. That heather tone really pleases me better than the plain smooth cloth I had in mind and I'll take it."

The customer explained that she walked in all weathers, and wanted warmth, not style, in the topcoat with

loose sleeves which she described succinctly. Grace produced half a dozen such coats, one of which her customer chose immediately. She slipped it on, said the sleeves were too short, and Irene passing along opportunely said that nothing could be easier than to let out the sleeve the required two inches.

"Be sure she's perfectly satisfied before she leaves," whispered Irene. "She looks like real money."

The old lady who looked like real money was watching attentively an evening gown whch was being displayed before a smartly-dressed young woman on the further side of the room. She drew out a memorandum book and turned over the leaves.

"I'll wait a moment to see whether that woman over there buys that gown. You might find out the measurements, if it will do for a thirty-six I'll take it for a niece of mine in Evansville. She's very fond of that rose color."

The rose colored gown was rejected a moment later by the lady who had been considering it and Grace laid it before her customer.

"My niece is just about your height and build, and has your coloring. I'd like to see that on you!"

Grace asked the nearest clerk whether there was any objection to meeting this unlooked for request. Certainly not, though there was a model for such purposes. The old lady who looked like real money didn't care to see the model in the gown and frankly said so. She expressed her gratification when Grace paraded before her in the gray and ivory fitting room. The price was three hundred dollars.

"Thank you, I'll take it."

Grace got out of the gown as quickly as possible, and presented the garments already chosen for final approval. The old lady who looked like real money

produced from her satchel a checkbook and a fountain pen.

The total was six hundred and ninety dollars. Grace regarded the bit of paper with awe; it was the largest check she had ever seen. The customer wrote out the shipping directions for her niece's gown, screwed the cap on her pen, took the cash sale slip Grace gave her and tucked it carefully away.

"You've been very nice to me. Thank you very much." She smilingly extended her hand. "Let this be a little secret between us!"

The secret was a ten dollar bill. The little old lady who really didn't look like real money was already in the elevator and Grace turned with relief to Irene, who inspected the office end of the cash-sale slip, and read aloud the signature on the check.

"Beulah Reynolds—you certainly drew a prize! I never saw her before but you've heard of her. She belongs to the old Hoosier nobility. Her people landed before the Indians left. She's lived all over the world and has just come back here and bought a house on Washington Boulevard. I read a piece about her in the paper. If she tipped you ten dollars it's a good sign. Don't you be squeamish about taking tips—it's all perfectly right and it won't happen often. Don't let your good luck turn your head; there's a lady coming now who looks as though she lived on lemons. Pass the sugar and see what you can do with her."

119162

II

Mrs. Durland was greatly distressed that a daughter of hers should have met Miss Beulah Reynolds in what she was pleased to term a servile capacity. Miss Reynolds was a personage, she said—a Colonial Dame,

a D. A. R. and everything else that implied noble American ancestry. Mrs. Durland had met her at a tea, which she described with minute detail. It was in Harrison's administration, she thought, though it might have been in the second consulship of Cleveland. That a lady so distinguished and wealthy should have given Grace ten dollars quite as though she were a waitress was humiliating. Miss Reynolds would never have thought of tipping the daughter of Alicia Morley Durland.

"I'm number Eighteen to all the world when I'm at Shipley's," Grace replied good-naturedly. "If I'd told her in a burst of confidence that I was your daughter she probably wouldn't have given me the ten which I sorely need. She was nice as possible and I didn't see anything wrong in taking her money."

"Well, of course she meant to be kind, dear; but it hurts me just a little."

Thanks to Mrs. Reynolds' generous purchases, Grace's envelope for the first week contained $35.21. Though warned by Irene that this was beginner's luck she was satisfied that she could master the selling art and earn a good income.

"You've got the gift, my dear. You'll build up a line of regular customers," Irene expatiated, "who'll always ask for you, and that's what counts. I notice that a good many customers already pick you out and refuse to be steered to the other girls at your end of the room. All due to your *beaux yeux,* as we say in Paris, and general air of being somebody in particular."

Grace quickly made friends in the store, both in and out of her own department. Two members of her sorority, who like herself had been obliged to leave college before finishing, sought her out; an alumna of

the state university, a woman of thirty, who was employed in the office as auditor, took her to lunch; a charming English woman, stranded in America and plying her needle in the alteration room, brought her books to read. Miss Vail at the glove counter knew all there was to know about palmistry, table-tipping and automatic writing and aroused Grace's curiosity as to the mysteries of the ouija board.

To break the monotony of her evenings, Grace asked Miss Vail and two other girls from the store to the house for some experiments. She had not announced in advance that the purpose of the meeting was to probe into the unknown, and had counted on Ethel's assistance in entertaining her friends; but when the ouija board was produced Ethel expressed a chilling disapproval of ouija and everything else pertaining to the occult. Mrs. Durland, anxious to promote harmony, suggested that they read aloud an article in a late magazine that explained ouija writing and similar phenomena. Of course Grace and her friends did not want scientific explanations of ouija; they wanted to see the thing work.

"Much unhappiness may be caused by such things," said Mrs. Durland; "and of course they mean nothing."

"I've always felt," remarked Ethel, "that there's something just a little vulgar about it."

"Oh, piffle!" exclaimed Grace impatiently. "We all know it's a joke; we just wanted to have a little fun out of it."

"Don't bother, Grace," said Miss Vail. "We'll just forget about it."

Stephen Durland, who had changed his clothes in honor of Grace's party, broke his silence to say:

"I don't see any harm in those things. They're

all explained on scientific grounds. I think it would be interesting to watch it work."

"It probably wouldn't work in such an atmosphere," said Grace, thoroughly irritated.

"Suppose," said Mrs. Durland with sudden inspiration, "you girls make fudge! I'll get the things ready. I never saw a girl yet who didn't like fudge."

Something had to be done to amuse the guests and Grace assented. Ethel, however, did not participate in the fudge making, but took herself off to bed. Grace resolved never again to ask any one to the house. She said as much to Ethel the next morning.

"You seem to forget that I pay my board here and help with the housework, too. I ought to have a few privileges. Those are as nice girls as I ever knew and you and mother drove us into the kitchen as though we were a lot of silly children. You're certainly the queen of the kill-joys."

"I should think," said Ethel, regarding her sister pityingly, "that with your education you'd be above putting yourself on the level with the cheap people who patronize fortune-tellers. People who really have faith that there's a life to come don't *need* such things. They have no place in a Christian home."

Grace stared at her helplessly. Ethel was an enigma; it was incredible that any one could feel so intensely about so small a matter, or find so complete a joy in making others uncomfortable.

CHAPTER THREE

I

Mrs. Durland, no doubt to show her sympathetic interest in her daughters' labors, asked innumerable questions every evening when the family gathered at the supper table. As Ethel's experiences were much less interesting than Grace's, the burden of these conversations fell largely upon Grace. Whenever Grace mentioned some customer her mother or Ethel knew or knew about, that person was subjected to the most searching analysis. It was incredible that they could be so interested in people of whom they knew only from reading of their social activities in the newspapers.

Ethel's preoccupations with her church and philanthropic affairs took her away several evenings in the week, and at such times Grace played checkers or sniff with her father while Mrs. Durland read or sewed. The fact that Grace's earnings averaged higher than Ethel's made it necessary for Mrs. Durland to soothe any feeling the older daughter manifested as to this disparity.

Grace found no joy in Ethel. Ethel hinted constantly that her work in Gregg and Burley's office placed her in a class much above that of a salesgirl. She had brought to perfection a kind of cloying sweetness in her attitude toward the other members of the family which Grace found hard to bear. Ethel was at pains to remind her father from time to time that it was due to his lack of foresight and initiative that she had been obliged to become a wage earner. Her re-

marks expressed something of the solicitude a mother might manifest toward a slightly deficient child. The effect of this upon Grace was to deepen her affection and sympathy for her father. Several times she persuaded him to go down town with her to a big motion picture house where there was good music. He enjoyed the pictures, laughing heartily at the comics; and laughter had been the rarest of luxuries in Stephen Durland's life. Mrs. Durland refused to accompany them; all the pictures she had ever seen had been vulgar and she was on a committee of the State Federation to go before the legislature and demand a more rigid censorship.

Grace's announcement that, on evenings when she went to the French class she had entered with Irene, she would stay down town for supper did not pass unchallenged at the supper table, which she had begun to dread for its cheerlessness and the opportunity it afforded her mother and sister to express their dire forebodings as to the future of the human race. One evening after listening to a reiteration of their predictions of calamity Grace broke the silence in which she usually listened to these discussions.

"I don't know where you get these ideas, Ethel. You must be unfortunate in your acquaintances if you're talking from your own knowledge."

Mrs. Durland rallied at once to Ethel's support.

"Now, Grace, you know Ethel is older and views everything much more soberly than you do. You know she's in touch with all these agencies that are trying to protect the young from the evils of a growing city."

"Just what evils?" Grace demanded.

"There are some things," said Ethel impressively, "that it's better not to talk about."

"That's always the way!" Grace flared. "You're always insinuating that the world's going to the devil but you never say just how. I know perfectly well what you're driving at. You think because I work in a department store I can't be as good as you are! I'll tell you right now that the girls I know in Shipley's are just as good as any girls in town—perfectly splendid hard-working girls. And one other thing I can tell you, they don't spend their time sneering at everybody else. I'd rather be the worst sinner in creation than so pure I couldn't see a little good in other people."

"Please, Grace!" Mrs. Durland pleaded. "You're unreasonable. No one was saying anything about you or any other girl in Shipley's."

"Oh, Ethel doesn't have to say it straight out! I'm not so stupid! Every time she takes that sanctified air she's preaching at me. I don't pretend to be an angel but I'm tired of hearing how wicked everybody is. I don't dare ask any of the girls I work with to the house; you think they're all rotten."

"I don't think they're all bad, and I've never said such a thing," Ethel declared, "But I *have* said that Irene Kirby is not the type of girl I'd deliberately choose to be my sister's most intimate friend, and I say it again."

"Now, Ethel, you girls mustn't hurt each other's feelings! If you must quarrel please don't do it before your father and me."

This consideration for her father's feelings was so unusual that Grace laughed. Durland had been twisting uneasily in his chair. His sympathies were wholly with Grace. Ethel's indirect method of criticizing her younger sister enraged him, and in this particular instance he was secretly pleased that Grace was strik-

ing back. He glanced about the table, cleared his throat and asked in his mild tone for a second cup of coffee.

"I hardly know Irene Kirby," said Ethel, "but I have heard some things about her I hate to hear about *any* girl."

"Such as what? Tell me just what you've heard," said Grace, sharply.

"Well, if you *insist*," replied Ethel, with affected reluctance, "she's keeping company with a married man. It's been going on for some time. They were seen together last Sunday night, quite late, driving into town. Suppose you ask Irene where she was last Sunday."

"What's the man's name?" Grace demanded.

"Oh, I needn't mention his name! You ask Irene to tell you. A girl friend of mine who used to work in his office saw them."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Grace. "You or I or any other girl might be seen driving with a married man without there being anything wicked about it."

"Well, you asked me and I told you," returned Ethel complacently. "It's not a new story. I knew it when I tried to persuade you not to go into Shipley's, but I thought I wouldn't tell you why I thought it best for you to keep away from Irene."

"Irene has been fine to me," said Grace quickly; "she's one of the nicest and one of the most intelligent girls I ever knew. I think it poor business for a girl like you, who pretends to be a Christian, to listen to scandalous stories about some one you hardly know. I'll say for Irene that I never heard her speak an unkind word of any one. Every day she does a lot of little kindnesses for people and she doesn't strut around about it either."

"I don't question that you believe all that, Grace," remarked Mrs. Durland as she served the rice pudding that was the regular dessert for Thursday evening. "But you know Ethel is very careful what she says about *every* one."

"Yes, I've noticed that," said Grace coldly.

Durland had eaten his pudding and was stolidly slipping his napkin into its ring. The better course might be to follow his example. Silence, Grace reflected, offered the surest refuge from family bickering. She saw the years stretching on endlessly, with her work-day followed by evenings of discord in the cheerless home circle. The prospect was not heartening. It was two against two, and her father was only passively an ally. When Roy came home he would be pretty sure to align himself with his mother and Ethel, in keeping with his general policy of taking the easier and more comfortable way in everything. It flashed through her mind that she might leave home and take a room somewhere or join with two or three girls and rent an apartment. But her parents needed her help. She knew that her father was wholly unlikely to assist materially with the household expenses. Ethel had not demurred when she volunteered to contribute in ratio to her earnings, which made her share at least a third more each week than Ethel's.

II

Ethel's intimations that Irene Kirby was not as good as she ought to be so exasperated Grace that in a spirit of contrariness she hoped they were true. At least she didn't care whether they were true or not. She knew little of Irene's family but the bitterness engendered by her own home life made it seem a natural and pardonable thing for a girl who worked

hard and was obliged to live in an atmosphere of perpetual criticism to take her pleasure where she pleased. Her curiosity as to Irene's social contacts was greatly aroused. Irene, outwardly at least the most circumspect of young women, certainly had mastered the art of keeping her private affairs to herself. Now and then she spoke of having gone to the theatre or to a dance with some young man whose name she always mentioned; but when Grace tried to tease her about her suitors Irene dismissed them disdainfully. They were impossible, she said, in her large manner—bank clerks, traveling salesmen or young fellows just starting in small businesses. She wasn't at all interested in marrying a young man with his way to make, cooking for him in the kitchenette of a four-room apartment, with a movie once a week as the reward for faithful service.

These views on matrimony were revealed one day early in November when they were lunching together in Shipley's tea room. She went on to say that she would wait a few years in the hope of meeting some man of importance who could give her a position in life worth while.

"It has been done before, my dear. It may not sound romantic but it's the only way to play safe. I want to get away from this town! It smothers and chokes me. The firm has sent me to New York twice this last year, and I think I could get along very well down there if I had money to spend. I've been a little afraid you'd engaged yourself to some struggling young professor at the university. No? Well, I'd hate to see you wasting yourself. You've got brains and good looks and I hope you won't throw yourself away. By the way—just what do you do with yourself evenings?"

"Oh, I stay at home, mostly. I do a turn in the kitchen, play a game of checkers with father and go to bed to read."

"Wholesome but not exciting! I'd imagined you had a few suitors who dropped in occasionally."

"Haven't had a caller since I came home," said Grace. "The beaux I had last summer don't know I'm home and I haven't felt like stirring them up."

Irene was wearing a handsome emerald ring that Grace had not noticed before. In keeping with the tone of subdued elegance she affected, Irene never wore jewelry; the ring was a departure and required an explanation for which Grace hesitated to ask. In spite of their long acquaintance Grace never overcame her feeling of humility before Irene's large view of things, her lofty disdain for small change. Grace knew more out of books than Irene; but in her cogitations she realized that beyond question Irene knew much more of life. Aware of Grace's frequent glances at the emerald, Irene held up her hand.

"Rather pretty, isn't it?" she asked carelessly. "That cost some real money. A little gift from a man who is foolish enough to admire me."

"It's perfectly beautiful," said Grace as Irene spread her fingers on the table. "It's the very newest setting and a wonderful stone. I don't believe I ever saw you wear a ring before."

"It's the first I've worn in years; but this is too good to hide." She looked at the stone absently. "By the way, Grace, you don't seem to be burdened with engagements. I wonder if you'd care to drive into the country tomorrow evening for dinner—a little party of four. My friend—the man who gave me this,"—she held up her hand,—"has a guest, a most interesting man you'd be sure to like. If you haven't

anything better to do it might amuse you to meet him. A party of three is a little awkward and you'd balance things beautifully."

Grace's heart quickened to find herself at last admitted to Irene's confidence, a thing flattering in itself. Ethel's charge that Irene was accepting the attentions of a married man was probably true, or the girl would have approached the matter differently. It dawned upon Grace that the word party had a meaning previously unknown to her, signifying a social event clandestine in character, in which the wives of married men were not participants. The idea was novel and it caused Grace's wits to range over a wide field of speculation.

"I suppose men do sometimes take their wives on parties that are a little different—just a quiet little kick-up?" she ventured.

"Not so you'd exactly notice it," Irene answered, with a shrug and a smile of indulgence at Grace's innocence. "A wife knows her husband and all his jokes; why should she meet him socially!"

"Tomorrow night's our French class," said Grace, recovering herself quickly. "We'd have to cut it."

"Oh, I hadn't forgotten that. To be frank about it, I thought that would make it easier for you to get away. I don't know just how your folks at home are—whether they always check you up as to where you go. As you've been staying down town on lesson nights that would help you put it over. I suggested Friday night to my friend instead of Saturday, hoping to make sure of you. There are plenty of girls who'll go on parties but this is a case where just any girl won't do. You'll fit in perfectly and I hope you'll go."

"Thanks, ever so much, Irene; of course, I'm

pleased to death to go," said Grace. "But, you'll have to tell me what to wear; my wardrobe's rather limited."

"Oh, the occasion doesn't call for magnificence. Dinner's to be in a charming old house about fourteen miles from town. I'm going to wear the simplest thing I have."

"It's awfully nice of you to ask me," said Grace, her eyes dancing at the prospect. "But if I mustn't mention the party at home, I'll have to get in early so mother and Ethel won't suspect anything."

"Let them suspect, honey! My family used to try to check me up every time I went to the corner to mail a postal; but they've got over it. By the way, I think that sister of yours doesn't like me. I passed her in the street yesterday and she gave me what I shouldn't call a loving look."

"She didn't mean anything," said Grace. "It's just that Ethel takes herself a little bit too seriously. She has all the old-fashioned ideas about things."

"She's got the uplift idea and all that sort of stuff. I met her in the office one day looking up a girl who had dropped out of her church club or something. That's all fine work; I'm not sneering at it; but people who go in for that kind of thing ought to remember we're not all born with wings."

"Oh, Ethel means well," said Grace, her mind upon the proposed dinner for four in the country, of which she was anxious to hear more. "What time do we start?"

"Seven o'clock. You may be sure I trust you or I shouldn't be asking you to go on this party," said Irene. "It's not a social event for the society columns—just an intimate little dinner to be forgotten when we all say good night. Our host is Mr. Kemp—

Thomas Ripley Kemp. You've seen his factory; it's as big as all outdoors. Don't look so scared! Tommy's a peach! You can't fail to like Tommy."

"Mr. Kemp is—married?" Grace ventured a little timorously.

"Oh, Tommy's been married for centuries! His wife's one of Shipley's best customers. She's awfully nice; I tell Tommy he ought to be ashamed of himself! Tommy's not stingy with his family, and he's terribly proud of them. He has a daughter in an Eastern college—a stunning girl. Elaine is just about my age,—isn't it weird!"

"I think I never saw Mr. Kemp, but of course I've heard of him," remarked Grace, bewildered by the familiar tone in which Irene spoke of Kemp and his family. "The other man—what's he like?" she asked with feigned carelessness.

"Oh, his name's Ward Trenton and he lives in Pittsburgh and is a consulting engineer and a way-upper all right. Tommy thinks the sun rises and sets in Ward. Ward drops in here every month or two and Tommy always throws him a party, sometimes at home or at one of the clubs; and when that's the ticket he naturally forgets to invite me! Screaming, isn't it? Ward isn't really a sport like Tommy, but he'll go on a party and keep amused in his own peculiar way. He does a lot of thinking, that man. You'll understand when you meet him. I'm never sure whether Ward approves of me, but he's always nice."

"He may not like me at all," said Grace.

"Don't be foolish! You're just the kind of girl men of that sort like. They're bored to death by girls—you know the kind—who begin every sentence with 'say' or 'listen,' and would drop dead if they ever had an idea. Tommy's the higher type of business man,"

Irene went on. "College education, fond of music and pictures and that sort of thing. By the way, Tommy has no particular love for that Cummings your father was in business with so long. Make the same line of stuff, don't they? The Cummingses are going strong since they moved up among the swells and it annoys Tommy a good deal. You know his folks landed here in 1820 and he's full of old family pride. He's perfectly screaming about it!"

"And Mr. Trenton—" Grace ventured, "is he married too?"

"All the nice men are more or less married, my dear! Ward is and he isn't. Tommy's never seen Mrs. Trenton, but there is such a person. Ward speaks of his wife in the friendliest sort of way, but they don't meet often, I imagine."

When Grace recurred to the matter of changing her clothes for the party, Irene's resourcefulness promptly asserted itself.

"There's a very chic suit in stock, marked down from eighty-seven to forty-two on account of an imperfection in the embroidery on the cuffs. It will do wonderfully and if you haven't the money handy I'll take care of it till you strike a fat week. We'll try it on you this afternoon and if you like it we'll send it up to Minnie Lawton's apartment and you can change there. I'll be doing the same—fact is, I keep a few duds at Minnie's for just such emergencies. Minnie's a good scout and attends strictly to her own business."

The Minnie Lawton Irene referred to held a responsible position with a jobbing house. Grace had met her at lunch with Irene several times and had found her a diverting person.

"Minnie's a broadminded woman," Irene remarked. "I usually meet Tommy at Minnie's when we're going

on a party, and that's the schedule for tomorrow evening. I'll call Tommy now and tell him everything's set."

The suit proved to be all that Irene had promised. Grace was not unaware that the attendants were observing her with frankly approving eyes.

"It certainly sets you off, Eighteen. That shade of Oriental blue is just right for you," said one girl.

"An inch off the sleeve will help; the collar pinches the least bit—or does it?" remarked Irene to the hovering fitter. "All right then; thank you."

Grace asked for an extra hour at noon the next day for a hair-washing, marcelling and manicuring, saying to Miss Boardman that she had an engagement with the dentist. Irene had suggested this, explaining that it wasn't lying as all the girls gave the same reason when asking extra time for any purpose, and Miss Boardman wasn't deceived by it.

Beyond a few experiments in her youth for which she was promptly punished, Grace had rarely resorted to deception; but manifestly she would be obliged to harden herself to the practice if she yielded to the temptation to broaden her experiences beyond the knowledge of the home circle. She tried to think of all the calamities that might befall her. Her father or mother might become ill suddenly; an attempt might be made to reach her at the rooms of the French instructor; but instead of being dismayed by the possibility Grace decided that it would be easy enough to explain that she had gone unexpectedly to the house of some friends of Irene who lived in the country. She was sure she could make a plausible story of this; and besides, if any one became so ill as to cause search to be made for her the fact that she hadn't gone to the French lesson would be overlooked. There might

be an automobile accident; the thought was disturbing but it troubled Grace only passingly.

"You'll soon learn to be ready with an *alibi* if you get caught," said Irene. "But the more independence you show the less you'll be bothered."

Lively expectations of a novel experience that promised amusement outweighed Grace's scruples before the closing hour of the appointed day. She and Irene left the store together and found a taxi to carry them to Minnie Lawton's apartment.

"We'll escape the trolley crowd," said Irene placidly, "and save time. Minnie's not going home for supper but I've got a key to her flat and we'll have the place to ourselves."

They were dressed and waiting when Kemp and his friend Trenton arrived. Assailed at the last moment by misgivings as to the whole adventure, Grace was relieved by her first glimpse of the two men. Kemp was less than her own height, of slender build and with white hair that belied the youthful color in his cheeks. The gray in his neatly trimmed mustache was almost imperceptible. Grace had pictured him of a size commensurate with his importance as the head of one of the largest industries in the city, but he was almost ridiculously small and didn't even remotely suggest the big masterful type she had imagined. His face lighted pleasantly as Irene introduced him. His power was denoted in his firm mouth and more particularly in his clear steady hazel eyes.

"It's so nice that you could come," he said. "I've known of your family a long time, of course, and Irene brags about you a great deal."

In marked contrast to Kemp, Trenton was tall and of athletic build, with gray-blue eyes, and a smile that

came a little slowly and had in it something wistful and baffling that piqued curiosity and invited a second glance. Grace appraised his age at about forty. She instantly decided that she preferred him to Kemp; he was less finished with nothing of Kemp's dapperness. His careless way of thrusting his hands into the pockets of his coat pleased her; he was not thinking of himself, not concerned as to the impression he made; slightly bored perhaps by the whole proceeding.

Trenton had greeted Irene cordially as an old acquaintance and it was evident that the three had met at other parties.

"I'm starving," said Irene; "let's be moving, Tommy."

"Certainly," replied Kemp. "I'm beginning to feel a pang myself."

A chauffeur opened the door of a big limousine that was waiting at the curb. They were quickly speeding countryward with Irene and Grace on the back seat with Trenton between them. Kemp, on one of the adjustable chairs, crossed his legs with the easy nonchalance characteristic of him.

"How's business, Irene?" he asked. "Are the dollars rolling into the Shipley till?"

"My department is running ahead of last year's business," said Irene, "but there's less call for the best grades."

"So? Same reports all over the country. We must charge it up to the war. Well, we can't change business conditions tonight. We'll all die bankrupt if things don't take a brace and we may as well eat and be merry while we can. Am I right, Ward?"

"Certain, Tommy."

"Don't always agree with me!" cried Kemp with feigned asperity. "You have a most disagreeable way of pretending to agree with me when you don't."

"You're too good a client for me to quarrel with. And besides you're always right, Tommy."

"Do stop spoiling him!" cried Irene. "Everybody spoils Tommy."

"Not you!" returned Kemp. "Your business in life seems to be to keep me humble."

"It doesn't show on you! You don't see any signs of it, do you, Ward?"

"I think he's aging fast," replied Trenton. "He's breaking down under the weight of his own humility."

"Find the man who's giving the party! It's going to be a beautiful evening for me. Just one knock after another! Grace, don't let these birds prejudice you against me!"

Kemp addressed her by her first name quite as though they were old acquaintances. They were skimming rapidly over the Meridian street bridge and her diffidence began to pass.

"I'll be your friend, Mr. Kemp," she said. "You needn't mind what the others say."

"That will be all right; he needs friends; but don't mister him. He's Tommy to one and all."

"'O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'
"Tommy, go away";
But it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when
the band begins to play',"—

Kemp quoted. "It's the same old story!" he finished in mock dejection.

"Speaking of music, did you bring some new records, Tommy?" Irene inquired. "The ones you have at the farm date from Rameses."

"Yes; there's a package of 'em up in front, the very latest jazz, and a few classic pieces for my own private consolation."

"That's just like him," said Irene. "Tommy thinks no one appreciates good music but himself."

Kemp and Irene continued to do most of the talking, occasionally appealing to Grace or Trenton to support them in their good-natured contentions. For a time Kemp and Trenton discussed business as frankly as though they were alone. Grace began to understand what Irene meant when she spoke of knowing men of attainment and enjoying their confidence. Kemp was saying that he was prepared to enlarge his plant the moment business took an upward turn. He meant to strike out more boldly into the South American markets than he had ever done before. His competitors didn't know it, and he didn't want them to know it, but he already had men down there preparing for an aggressive campaign. His tone was optimistic and confident. It was evident that he paid great deference to Trenton's opinions and was anxious for his approval of his plans. Once after Trenton had answered at length and with the care that seemed to be habitual with him a technical question as to the production by a new method of castings of a certain kind, Kemp turned and remarked to the young women:

"That answer's worth money! It's a joy to talk to a man who knows his stuff."

"Even I could understand it!" said Grace, "or I thought I did."

Her father sometimes had explained to her problems in mechanics and Trenton had employed terms with which she was familiar.

"I'd rather expect you to know something about

such things, Grace," said Kemp. "Your father was a pioneer in certain fields. Stephen Durland, you know, Ward,—used to be in the Cummings concern."

"I know the name of course. I've run across it frequently in the patent office reports. Your father's been a prolific inventor."

"Yes; he's always inventing something, but I'm afraid many of his things don't work!"

"That's true of hundreds," said Kemp, "but certain of Stephen Durland's inventions are still standard. I know because I've tried to cut under 'em with things of my own! It was a scoundrelly trick for Cummings to put him out of the company—that's what I understand happened. You know I believe every mean thing I hear about Cummings."

"Oh, I suppose it was strictly a business matter," said Grace.

"Beastly ingratitude, I'd call it," exclaimed Kemp. "I've been told that your father waived all rights to royalty on all the patents he put into the company and Cummings only gave him a fifth of the stock in the original corporation to cover everything. Do pardon me! But that whole business made me hot when I heard about it."

"It was pretty hard to bear," Grace murmured.

"I'm no angel," said Kemp, "but in the long run I think we get it in the neck if we don't play the game straight. Cummings is riding for a fall. It tickles me to see two or three places right now where he's likely to come a cropper. His narrowness and lack of vision are going to have the usual result."

"But you, the great Kemp, are going to push right ahead!" laughed Trenton, laying his hand on his friend's knee.

"Oh, nothing can keep Tommy down," exclaimed

Irene in mock admiration. "Tommy's brain isn't just cottage cheese."

Kemp enjoyed their chaffing and encouraged it. They were still discussing Grace's suggestion that Mars and other planets might become littered with Kemp machinery as new markets were sought for it when they reached the farm.

III

A winding road led from the highway through a strip of woodland that bore upward to a ridge where the lights of the house suddenly burst upon them. The river, Kemp explained, lay just below.

A Japanese boy in white duck flung open the door and smilingly bowed them in.

Kemp called his place The Shack, but in reality it was a dignified old homestead that had been enlarged and only slightly modernized. The parlor and sitting room of the old part had been thrown into one room with the broad fire place preserved. The floors were painted and covered with rag rugs; the furniture was of a type that graced the homes of well-to-do Middle Westerners in about the period of the Mexican war. The rooms were lighted by a variety of glass table-lamps with frosted shades adorned with crystal pendants. These survivals of the days of "coal-oil" lighting were now cleverly arranged to conceal the electrical source of their illumination.

"Isn't it a peach of a house?" demanded Irene as she convoyed Grace through the lower rooms with a careless air of proprietorship. She led the way up the steep stairway, that had been retained as built by the original owner, to the rooms above. The exten-

sions, following strictly the original simple architecture, made a commodious place of the house, which rambled on in an inadvertent fashion bewildering to a first visitor. A wing that had been added in recent years was hardly distinguishable from the old rooms. Concessions to modern convenience and comfort had been made in the sleeping rooms, of which there were half a dozen, with white woodwork, walls in neutral tints, and wicker furniture in summer cottage style.

"It's all perfectly adorable," cried Grace as they paused in one of the rooms.

"You've got to hand it to Tommy," remarked Irene; "he does have taste."

"Maybe—" Grace hesitated and Irene instantly read her thoughts.

"Oh, you're looking for the traces of a woman's hand! Bless your heart, Mrs. Kemp doesn't bother about The Shack! It was Tommy's idea. The family come out for week ends in the spring and fall and Tommy makes a point of having Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners out here, and Mrs. Kemp invites the guests. I need hardly say"—Irene walked to a chiffonier and inspected her face intently in the mirror—"that I've never been invited to these *en famille* functions."

"It seems queer," remarked Grace, dropping her hat on the bed,—"I mean it's queer our being here when *she* doesn't know!"

"Why not?" said Irene, surveying herself slowly before the glass. "She'd probably like us if she knew us, and didn't know we work for a living. If Tommy just has to play a little isn't it fine that he chooses nice little playmates like us? He might do much worse, and get into awful scrapes. You needn't be afraid that the lady of the house will come tearing in and

make a fuss. Tommy never takes a chance. Her ladyship's in New York spending a lot of money and having a grand old time. For all we know she's playing around a little bit herself!"

"Oh, it wasn't that I was thinking of so much," Grace replied hastily. "I was just thinking that it's like a play, this quaint interesting house hidden away, with all these lovely things, and kind of funny to think that there is a woman somewhere who belongs here."

"While we're here *we* belong, my dear. We'll pretend it's all ours. My conscience had awful twinges the first time I came out; but one does somehow get used to things. There's no use bucking the spirit of the age; we've got to step to the music of the band. Tommy prefers a party of four and nearly always brings an out of town man, so I have to find the other girl. If you like this party I'll put you on for some more."

She swung around and eyed Grace critically.

"You're just right! Tommy whispered to me in the car that you were wonderful,—the first thing you know he'll be flirting with you."

"Don't be so foolish! Any one can see that he's crazy about you."

"Well, that kind of insanity doesn't last. These little affairs are good for a while, but something always happens sooner or later."

She spoke with cheerful indifference as though it were the inevitable ordering of fate that such affairs should be brief.

At the table, with candles diffusing a yellow glow upon the silver and crystal the party struck at once a key of gaiety.

"Don't be afraid of the cocktail, Grace," said Kemp,

lifting his glass; "only a little orange juice and a very good gin I planted out here in the woods before prohibition."

"When all the rest of the world is dry Tommy will still have a few bottles put away," said Irene. "There's going to be champagne, too! Here's to you, Tommy!"

Grace sipped the cocktail warily, drank a third of it and put it down with a covert glance at the others to see whether they were watching her.

"We're all entitled to a dividend," said Kemp. "Get busy, Jerry."

Grace was fingering the stem of the cocktail glass, meditating whether she should try it again, when Trenton met her gaze. Irene and Kemp were talking animatedly, quite indifferent to the other members of the party.

"You really don't want that," Trenton said. "If you're not used to it let it alone."

He took her glass, brimming from the dividend Jerry had poured into it, and slowly drained it.

With a smile Grace quickly moved the glass back in front of her plate, glancing at Irene and Kemp to see whether they were observing her.

"Thank you ever so much. I really am not used to those things."

"I thought not; otherwise I should have let you alone."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Oh, that's part of my business, to know things without being told. You might say that I earn my living that way."

He seemed amused about something; he constantly seemed secretly amused in a way of his own; but there was no mistaking his wish to be kind, and Grace was

grateful for his kindness. The light touch of his fingers as he took the glass from her hand was in itself reassuring.

"We're alone in the midst of a deep, dark forest," she heard Kemp exclaim.

Turning, she saw him bending toward Irene, his arm round her shoulders, kissing her.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

THAT Irene and Kemp should embrace and kiss at the table Grace assumed to be the accepted procedure at such parties. Kissing to the accompaniment of cocktails was not without its piquancy, but the picture presented by Irene and Kemp she found unedifying. Under the stimulus of alcohol Kemp and Irene seemed to have thrown away the dignity with which they had begun the party. Grace was not without her experience of kissing, but her experiences had been boy-and-girl transactions, all the sweeter for their privacy. She wondered whether it might not be necessary for Trenton to kiss her, but instead he rebuked Kemp and Irene with mock severity for their unbecoming conduct.

"You two have no manners! We're terribly embarrassed on this side of the table."

"Do excuse us!" cried Kemp. "We were merely carried away by our emotions. I just happened to remember that I hadn't kissed Irene for a week."

"Well, you needn't pull that cave man stuff here," said Irene petulantly. She opened her vanity box and squinted at herself in the tiny mirror.

"Pardon, everybody, while I powder my nose."

"Ward's never been kissed to my knowledge, Grace," said Kemp, apparently undisturbed by Irene's complaint of his roughness. "The field's open to you!"

"Oh, we're not going to begin in public," said Grace; "are we Ward?"

She turned smilingly toward Trenton, who met her gaze quizzically.

"I'll say I've never been so tempted before," he answered.

"Oh, you're bound to come to it!" cried Irene. "Grace can't pretend she's never been kissed. She's just a little coy, that's all."

"I'm not coy!" Grace protested. "But I'm all out of practice."

"Well, we can easily fix that!" said Kemp, jumping to his feet. "I'm going to kiss you right now. My sense of hospitality demands it."

"Not much you're not!" cried Irene, forcing him back into his chair. "I see you kissing Grace!"

"Jealous!" cried Kemp, striking his hands together with delight. "Jealous at last! But you needn't be scared Grace. There's no fun kissing a girl against her will."

"How do you know it would be against my will?" Grace demanded.

"Well, it would be against mine," said Irene. "Ward, why don't you keep Grace interested? I'm not going to have Tommy falling in love with her. We've had some girls out here who played up to Tommy and tried to take him away from me. That's why I brought Grace. She's an old pal of mine and my little boy's not going to flirt with her, is you Tommy?"

"Of course I isn't!" Kemp answered and in proof of his loyalty he kissed Irene again.

The food Jerry was serving called for praise and the Japanese grinned his appreciation of the compliments they bestowed upon his cooking. Kemp carved the turkey; he always did his own carving; it gave the home touch, he explained. Irene said she would make the salad dressing and that would be another home

touch. The essentials were placed before her and she composed the dressing after a recipe Kemp had taught her. It was the inspiration of Kemp's pet waiter in a New York club. Kemp talked for some time of waiters he knew and their genius in the composition of salads.

Grace had never before heard food discussed by an epicure. It seemed odd that a busy man should have given so much time and thought to the formulae of the kitchen. Kemp appealed to Trenton for confirmation of his appraisement of the merits of the cooking they had enjoyed together in various parts of the country, Trenton replying in a whimsical fashion, tolerant of his friend's enthusiasm, but letting it be known that as for himself he was much less fastidious about his food. Kemp paused in his neat, skilled carving of the turkey to deliver a lecture on green turtle soup. One might have thought that the whole progress of civilization depended on settling then and there exactly where green turtle soup attained perfection. Kemp's insistence that the New York Yacht Club was entitled to highest honors in this particular brought from Trenton the remark that he knew a place in Kansas where the mock turtle was preferable to any other liquid food he knew.

"Heathen!" cried Kemp disdainfully.

"Let's talk of ham and eggs,—a brain food superior to the much-boasted pie," Trenton suggested. "There's a boarding house in a coal mining town in Southern Colorado where a woman sets out the best ham and eggs I ever ate. I ought to know; I ate 'em three times a day for two months!"

"You're an ostrich! If you don't swear this is the finest turkey you ever ate I'll tell Jerry to serve you ham and eggs and I'll make you eat 'em."

Grace eyed her champagne glass with the same

hesitancy with which she had regarded the cocktail. She had never before seen champagne. From what she had heard and read of it she knew it to be one of the essentials of the new order of life into which she was being initiated.

"That's the very last," said Kemp, taking the bottle from the cooler and holding it up for their admiration. "Positively the last!"

"Same old joke!" exclaimed Irene. "Tommy's got enough liquor hid away out here to last forty years. I've seen the cave he built to keep it in—there's oceans of it!"

"A rotten exaggeration," Kemp rejoined, thrusting the bottle back into the cooler and taking up his glass. "I haven't enough to last me twenty."

Irene now engaged him in a lively debate as to the merits of the wine. She pretended to a critical knowledge of vintages and after demanding to see the label expressed serious doubts as to the authenticity of the contents.

Kemp challenged her assertions; apparently the two found the greatest pleasure in taunting each other.

"They're off!" groaned Trenton; "you'd think they hated each other from the way they talk. We'll be dignified, Grace, and keep out of their silly controversies. Between ourselves, I've been exposed to a great deal of champagne, but I can't tell one brand from another."

"It's terribly dangerous, isn't it?" asked Grace, peering into her glass. "I took your advice about the cocktail and I didn't feel it at all; how much may I drink of this?"

"Well, about a quarter of that won't do you any harm," Trenton replied after pondering the matter with exaggerated gravity. "It seems to me you're rub-

bing it in just a little by asking my opinion in that tone of voice. One might think I was your father."

"Oh, you're not nearly old enough for that! But would you be ashamed of me," Grace asked, sipping the wine and holding up the glass each time that he might see that she was not exceeding her allowance.

"I shouldn't be ashamed of you even if you were my aunt! I was just thinking how singular it is that when a man reaches forty he wants every girl he meets to think he's only twenty-seven. Have you noticed that?"

"No; but I'll remember it. I can see you're terribly wise. Have I had enough of this pretty stuff?"

He inspected her glass carefully and nodded.

"Just about."

"If I drank it all I might be more amusing," she suggested. "I might be as lively as Irene."

"Let me study you first without artificial stimulation. As I have every intention of keeping sober myself you'll get some little idea of what manner of being I am. A first meeting is important—it's either that or nothing. If we both got tipsy it would be different; but frankly I don't like being tipsy. Oh, don't think I've never been! Far, far from it. But tonight I have a feeling that it wouldn't be appropriate for me to lose my head."

"No-o?" she inquired, with all the mockery she dared employ.

They were interrupted by a question from Kemp, who was now discussing automobiles with Irene. Kemp invited Trenton's support in his defense of the limousine in which they had driven to The Shack. The car was not to Irene's liking and she warned him never to buy another of the same make. Kemp tried to explain why he had not met her wishes in the

matter. The car was a product of his home town and the manufacturer was a friend and it was his policy to patronize local industries. Grace thought it ridiculous that Irene should show so much feeling about a matter which was, strictly speaking, none of her concern. The car had seemed to Grace a machine of much splendor and it had borne them speedily and comfortably to the farm. She was unable to understand why her friend was so earnestly denouncing it.

"Don't let them bother you," said Trenton, "they get into a row about cars every time I'm here. Their ignorance is pitiful; neither one of them knows a thing about it."

"Who doesn't know anything about cars?" demanded Irene testily.

"Ah! I've wakened the enemy's pickets," laughed Trenton. "You two ought to remember that just six weeks ago tonight you threshed out the whole business. You ought to know by this time, Irene, that Tommy is as obstinate as a mule. He'd be sure to buy the very car you warned him against."

"Oh, I knew all the time that's what he'd do. Of course I don't have to be satisfied. But I'd rather ride in a jitney," Irene rejoined scornfully.

"Knowing your aristocratic taste I don't see you," said Kemp, turning to the others. "We are not really fussing today; it's just a little sketch we're putting on. Irene and I never quarrel. I just lead her on for the joy of seeing how ignorant she is about the things she spouts about the loudest."

The talk now shifted to the theatre, it appearing that Kemp in his business trips to New York found time to cultivate the acquaintance of many actors and actresses. Irene had met some of them, both in New York, where she seemed to have encountered Kemp

on her buying excursions for Shipley's, and at home, where Kemp always "threw a party" for his particular admirations among theatrical people when they visited Indianapolis. Apparently these parties had been very gay from the manner in which Irene and Kemp referred to them. They recounted with particular delight an occasion on which the star of a musical comedy had with the greatest difficulty been put into condition to resume his itinerary after a Saturday night at The Shack. Irene was moved to immoderate laughter at the recollection.

"When he gets a bun he's ever so much funnier off the stage than he ever is on. He climbed out of a window when we were trying to get him in shape to go to his train and would you believe it!—we found him in the barnyard talking to a pig! Then he cried to take the little brown piggy with him; he said he wanted it for his understudy. He was perfectly screaming about that silly little pig, and we fooled around so long he missed the last possible train and Tommy had to drive him clear to Chicago for a Sunday night opening. He kept saying every time we told him he had missed another train that he would wait till it came back! You couldn't beat that!"

Grace and Trenton were laughing more at Irene's enjoyment of her own story than at the incident itself. They learned that the comedian had finally been landed at the stage door of the Chicago theatre where he was to appear barely in time to dress for his part. Kemp was enthusiastic about the drive, which had broken all records. He interrupted Irene's story with many details of the flight which she had forgotten.

When Irene and Kemp again became absorbed in each other Grace picked up the thread of her talk with Trenton.

"We stopped just where it was growing interesting,"

she remarked. "Let's go right on where we left off. You were saying you thought it better not to lose your head tonight. Was that on my account? Am I such a young innocent that you've got to take care of me?"

He laughed at the eagerness with which she flung these sentences at him. If she was affected by her restricted potations there was nothing in her manner or speech to indicate the fact. Her eyes were bright, but only from the excitement of her entrance upon a new field of adventure. Once a young student at the university had addressed some verses "To Her Questing Eyes" and published them in one of the college periodicals. The poem had been instantly recognized as a tribute to Grace Durland; questing was a fitting term for a certain look that came into her eyes at times when her habitual eager gaze became crossed oddly with a far-away look of revery. Trenton was doing full justice to her eyes and was mindful of their swift changes.

"On the whole I don't really believe you need protecting," he answered. "Oh, just a little, perhaps; but I think I'd trust you to take care of yourself."

"But what if I don't want to be taken care of! What if I want to jump into the water with a big splash!"

"Um! So that's the idea? Well, I think you'd swim out; and yet again you mightn't. There are those who don't," he ended gravely.

"I'm not afraid—I'm not afraid of anything!" she said with a defiant lifting of her head.

"Dear me!" He narrowed his eyes and looked at her sharply. "Broadly speaking, it's better not to be afraid of life; life's got to be lived." He pecked at his salad for a moment, then put down his fork and went on. "We've got to meet situations; play the

game with the cards as they're dealt. We hear a good deal these days about our grand old grandfathers and what heroic stuff they were made of. They fought with savages who didn't have the right ammunition to fight back with; but nowadays the savages are inside of us. The wild streak in man is showing itself. It's in all of us."

He touched his breast lightly and smiled to minimize the seriousness of what he was saying.

"Right around here, where the corn grows tall, you might think—and probably a lot of people back yonder in the city like to think—that everything's safe and it's easy to be good! We're all being tested all the time. The man who was an angel fifty years ago would probably be a perfect devil these days if he had half a chance. The world is a different place every morning; but that's only an old habit the world has. It keeps spinning a little faster all the time. Now we've got right here—" with a slight movement of the head he indicated Kemp and Irene—"we've got a situation that wouldn't have been possible twenty years ago—at least not in a town like this. But we may be sure something of the kind was going on only it was better hidden. Nowadays with more people and more wealth and the general craving for excitement things happen differently. We may regret such things, you and I, but we are not helping matters by denying they exist. Everybody is restless; people are living as though they expected to die tomorrow and are afraid they're going to miss something; but I don't believe people are wickeder than they used to be. What we used to call wicked we call naughty now, and pretend it doesn't matter!"

He spoke half questioningly, as though not sure of her assent.

"I suppose that's so," she replied soberly. "I never thought of it in that way. But," she added, "you must have lots of other responsibilities—more important ones, without troubling about me."

"We're not much use in the world if we haven't a few. I think—I think I might put you on my list. How would you like that?"

"It would be wonderful if you thought me worth thinking about after we leave here!" she answered, her eyes bright.

"If I never saw you again I shouldn't forget you. You're a vivid person; I can honestly say that you're the most interesting person I've met in a long time."

They were interrupted by Irene and Kemp who rose suddenly from the table.

"Tommy and I are going to dance," said Irene. "You two can have your coffee where you like. There's a cordial if you want it—Tommy has everything, you know." She rested her hand for a moment on Trenton's shoulder. Her face was flushed and her voice a little strident. "You two are spooning beautifully. You may be awfully proud of yourself, Grace. I never saw Ward so interested in any girl before."

"Run along, Irene; Grace and I are talking of serious matters," Trenton replied.

"Listen to that, Tommy! These idiots are serious! It'll never do to leave them here."

Kemp caught Trenton by the arm and dragged him from his chair.

"Can't be serious 'n my house, Ward Trenton! Always too serious for Irene and me. Just look 't that beautiful girl I got you to play with; silly to be serious with a girl like that."

"All right; we'll dance then," said Trenton, amiably.

"Thass the talk! Don't forget this 's a party, not a funeral."

Jerry had rolled back the rugs and pushed the furniture out of the way in the living room. Kemp and Irene were already on the floor dancing exaggeratedly to the air of one of the new records.

"I'm not up to date on the new stuff," remarked Trenton apologetically; but Grace found that he danced well and evidently with enjoyment.

"You two not drinkin' enough," said Kemp in one of the pauses, planting himself waveringly before Trenton and Grace and extending a glass. "Gotta drink more; party's no good without wine; lots o' wine. Want everybody t' get soused like me."

II

Grace's experience of drunkenness had been limited to the occasional sight of a tipsy man in the street and she was shocked by the unhappy change in Kemp's appearance. His suave courtesy had disappeared. His hair was in disorder; Irene had rumpled it before they left the table, saying that he was too pretty; and as he talked his head moved queerly in time with his jerky articulation. And he looked old; one might have thought that Age, as a punishment for his intemperance had snatched away his youthful mask. Finding that Grace and Trenton paid no heed to his demand that they drink more wine he followed them over the floor and finally arrested them while he apologized elaborately for neglecting Grace. She was his guest and it was time that he was dancing with her. Irene rose from the couch where she had been watching them and announced her determination to

teach Trenton a new step; his manner of dancing was all out of date she said. She flung her arms around his neck and with her head on his shoulder pushed him about, while Kemp, delighted at Trenton's discomfiture, clapped his hands in time to the music.

Grace, finding herself free, seized the moment to try to escape, but Kemp lunged to the door and intercepted her.

"Runnin' 'way from me! Awfu' bad manners run away from host. Gotta dance with me like Irene. Thass right, Grace; good li'l' sport; Irene's friends all good sports."

He caught her arms and clasped them about his neck but as his muddled senses were unequal to responding to the rhythm of the music the performance resolved itself chiefly into an attempt on Grace's part to keep him on his feet.

"Sorry I stepped on you. Awfu' sorry, Grace. Wouldn't step on you for anything in this wide, wide world."

"Oh, it was great fun!" Grace cried when the record had played itself out. She was determined to make the best of it, but Trenton, mopping his brow, intervened.

"Tommy, you're too rough! Grace doesn't want to dance any more; we're going to have our coffee. You go and dance with Irene."

"Poor sport! Awfu' poor sport," Kemp retorted as Trenton led Grace away. He bawled after them his conviction that they were both poor sports and resumed dancing with Irene.

Jerry had placed the coffee-tray in a long, comfortably furnished sun porch opening off the dining room, where the music and the voices from the living room penetrated only feebly.

"I think I'm going to like this better," said Grace with a sigh of relief.

"A little calm *is* agreeable after a rough house," said Trenton watching her intently as she seated herself by the table and filled the cups. "Tommy never knows his limit," he went on, taking a cigarette from a silver box on the stand. "He can't carry the stuff as he used to and he doesn't act pretty when he's shot. But he recovers quickly; he'll be all right soon. Irene knows how to manage him. One lump, thank you."

Grace was still breathing deeply from the violence of her romp with Kemp. She was hoping that Trenton would renew the talk she had been enjoying at the table; but his silence was disconcerting. She wondered whether he was not purposely waiting for her to speak, to show her reaction to the scenes in which they had been participating in the living room.

She turned to him presently with a slight smile on her lips.

"You can see that I'm a terrible greenhorn. I don't know how to act at a party—not this kind of a party. I suppose it isn't nice of us to run away, but you were an angel to come to the rescue."

"It's always pleasant to be called an angel!" he remarked. "It hasn't happened to me for sometime. Tommy would die of chagrin if he knew he'd been making a monkey of himself; but he's likely to do most anything when he gets a bun."

Jerry came in to inspect the wick of the coffee lamp and Trenton detained him.

"Oh! Jerry, you needn't serve any more drinks. Mr. Kemp doesn't need any more."

"Yezzah." The boy bowed imperturbably and withdrew.

"Jerry and I understand each other perfectly. He'll take care of that. I wonder what the boy thinks! But you never can penetrate the innermost recesses of the Oriental mind. He probably doesn't approve of Tommy's parties, if we knew the truth."

"I suppose he's used to them. Let me see, what were we talking about?"

"We hadn't settled anything; we were going round in a circle.

"Then let's keep revolving! I want to hear you talk some more. I want to know your ideas about everything."

"Oh, that's a large order," he laughed. "But I'll do my best!"

She was struck suddenly with a fear that he might be finding her company irksome. It was quite likely that at other times, when he had been provided with a companion familiar with the technic of such parties, he had contributed more to the gaiety of the occasions. But her imagination was unequal to the task of visualizing him in such antics as Kemp was engaged in. He impressed her more and more as she studied him as a man who kept himself in perfect control; who found indeed a secret enjoyment in merely looking on when others were bent upon making an exhibition of themselves.

"We were speaking awhile ago of our naughtiness in accepting an invitation to a function like this. I've attended a lot of such parties here and elsewhere. I am always wondering why I'm invited and why I go. Perhaps," he smiled quizzically, "it's to give moral tone! That's undoubtedly why you were invited."

"That excuse won't do for me!" she replied quickly. "I wanted to come; I was perfectly crazy to come!"

"Well, it's just as well to satisfy your curiosity. I

assure you these parties are all alike. I've taken a hand in them in every part of the world. The only thing that makes this one different is—" he smiled broadly and his eyes danced with humor—"is you! I might say that you are quite different. You create an atmosphere quite your own."

"Hurry up and explain that!" She clasped her hands in mock appeal. "I might be different and still very unsatisfactory!"

"Yes, there is that possibility," he answered musingly. "A girl requires a little practice to catch the stroke. That is, she has got to get over the first shock before she becomes a good party girl. You're a novice. It will be interesting to know just how you emerge from the novitiate."

"Would you be interested in that,—really?"

"Vastly!"

Her attention wavered and with a quick lifting of the head she bent a startled questioning look upon him. The new records of distinguished operatic stars which Kemp and Irene had been playing had served as a faint accompaniment to their talk, but the music and the sound of voices were no longer audible in the sun porch. Grace glanced nervously about, oppressed by the silence. Voices and steps were heard in the rooms above. Trenton asked if she had read a novel which he took from the lower shelf of the stand that held the coffee things. Her negative reply was almost hostile and she did not meet his gaze. Her face wore a look of cold detachment. It seemed to him that the girl was no longer there; that what he saw was merely a shadowy shape that might pass utterly at any moment. He rose and dropped his half-smoked cigarette into an ash-tray on the stand. When he faced her again the look

had changed. He interpreted it as an appeal and he was not unmindful of its poignancy. She sat erect, her head lifted, her hands clasped upon her knees.

"I was just wondering—" she began.

"Oh, Tommy and Irene? They're about somewhere," he said carelessly. He reached for a fresh cigarette, eyed it as though it were an unfamiliar thing and lighted it deliberately. That look in her face, the appeal in her eyes, had struck deep into him. He sat down beside her on the davenport, crossed his knees and folded his arms. His composure restored her confidence. In a moment she settled back, quite herself again.

He touched rapidly upon a great number of problems, talking well, with an animation that surprised her. But she knew that he was trying to make her forget her perturbation of a moment ago. It was an enormous satisfaction to know that he understood; it was almost uncanny that he understood so much of what was in her mind and heart without being told.

"If it isn't impudent for me to ask, I'd like to know just what you're aiming at," he said. "You look like a girl who might be cursed with ambitions. Can't you let me into the secret?"

"Oh, honestly, I haven't any! When I was at the university I thought I had some—but they were silly. Like every other girl I was crazy for a while to be a trained nurse, then a settlement worker, and I even thought I might be a writer, and for about a week I had a craze to study medicine. Then I had to leave college, so I took a job in a department store! How's that for ambition!"

"A little mixed; but the books are not closed yet! There's plenty of time for fresh entries. There's marriage. You've overlooked that. That must be on the program!"

"It's not the first number! College girls who don't get married the day after commencement are likely to wait awhile. I'm not a bit excited about getting married. I want to look the world over before I settle down."

Suppose you fell in love—some fine fellow who could take good care of you. What then?"

"Well, I've had chances to marry and I couldn't see it. I've never been in love—not really. There's a professor who wanted to marry me—a widower with two children. You wouldn't have me do that? And young fellows, several of them, very nice, who caused me a lot of bother before I got rid of them. I liked them all but I couldn't love them."

"Then I'll make the prediction that always applies in such cases; some day you'll meet just the right man and that will be the end of it."

"Maybe; but I don't see it now. All I want—all I want right now is to be free!" she said and a far-away look came into the dark eyes.

"One can be free and terribly lonesome too," he suggested. "There's nothing quite so horrible as being lonesome. This is a big world and just knocking around by yourself isn't much good. We all need companionship; the soul cries for it."

She glanced at him quickly, surprised at his sudden seriousness and the note of depression in his voice. In her great liking for him she groped for an explanation of his change of mood. He had not struck her as at all a moody person. Some reply seemed necessary and she was at a loss to know what to say to him.

"But you're a success!" she exclaimed. "It's only when a man fails that he's likely to be lonesome."

"Success is a beautiful word, but to myself I'm a decided failure. I've failed in the most important

thing a man ever undertakes. Don't look at me like that! I'll explain. I'm supposed to be a mechanical expert, but there's one mechanism that's beyond me. I'm referring to the heart of a woman. My ignorance of that contrivance is complete."

The grim look that had come into his face yielded to a smile as he saw her bewilderment.

"You're going to be bored in a minute! I didn't want you to think me more than twenty-seven and you're already guessing that I'm at least seventy and a doddering wreck!"

"I wasn't thinking that at all. You seemed unhappy and I was sorry!"

"Well, don't be sorry for me. I'm not deserving of anyone's pity—not even my own. When I spoke of failure I was thinking of my marriage. Irene probably told you I'm married?"

"Oh, yes; I asked her the first thing!"

"And it made no difference to you—about coming I mean."

"None whatever," she laughed. "I just thought of it as an experience."

"Rather like studying a bug under glass, is that it?"

"Yes, something of the sort. But—you were speaking of your wife."

"Well," he said with a smile; "my being married is not a confidential matter; nothing to hide or be ashamed of. My wife is a very charming woman. You'd probably fall under her spell if you knew her; people frequently do. And I think she'd probably like you."

"Not if she knew I had met you at a party like this."

"Bless you, that wouldn't make a particle of difference in her liking you or not liking you! She's broad-

minded—very much so! And it's one of her many good points that she isn't jealous. If she came in here and found me talking to you she wouldn't scream and break up the furniture; she'd join in the conversation and make herself interesting—say startling things just to make us sit up. After a fashion she's a philosopher, very much entertained by what the world's doing. She sees in me only one of the many millions, a queer specimen for the microscope. She actually puts me into the books she writes!"

Grace bent her head, lifted it quickly and exclaimed: "Is she Mary Graham Trenton? I've read her 'Clues to a New Social Order' but I never imagined——"

"No, you wouldn't connect me with anything so daring! I need hardly repeat that she's a broad-minded woman. I'd be interested to know how you come to know about that book."

"Oh, that's easy enough. We had a lecture on it in our sociology course at the university. The head of the department didn't approve of Mrs. Trenton's views and warned us against the book, so of course I read it!"

"Naturally!"

"But it's interesting; awfully interesting."

"Written, I assure you," laughed Trenton, "by a remarkable woman!"

III

The unhappy marriages of which Grace had known had failed for obvious reasons, but Trenton's case was fascinating in its subtleties. He spoke of his wife as a man might speak of a woman he admired in a detached sort of way without really knowing her.

In spite of his amiable attitude toward Mrs. Trenton, Grace found herself instantly his partisan; she was sure his failure as he called it was his wife's fault. She greatly disliked this woman she had never seen. She started and flushed when he said abruptly, almost as though he had read her thoughts:

"You're getting ready to pity me—but don't do it! It's something in me that's wrong. We don't quarrel and throw dishes across the table or call each other names. We respect each other tremendously. It isn't even one of these triangular affairs,—another man or woman. When we meet now and then we talk quite sanely and sensibly of the news of the day and the arts and sciences, as two strangers might talk in a smoking car. The trouble may lie right there. A man and wife must be necessary to each other to make a perfect marriage and we are not. For seven or eight years we've mostly gone our separate ways. She has her own interests, plenty of them. If I tell her I'm going to Hong Kong to do a job and ask her to go along she'll say that she doesn't think it would amuse her. She'll go to Paris and stay till I come back. All cheerful, you understand; no row! Mrs. Trenton's quite able to do as she pleases,—as to money, I mean,—independently of me. And she knows people everywhere and they like to have her around. I like having her around myself!"

"Perhaps one of these days everything will come right," said Grace.

"Possibly," he said. "But that's enough of me. Let's talk about you a little."

He drew her out as to her experiences at the university but when these were exhausted he told her something of his own history. He had been thrown upon the world at an early age, and, not without difficulty,

had worked his way through a technical school. His profession had carried him to every part of the world. He told amusing stories of the reaction of remote foreign peoples to the magic of modern machinery. No other man had ever interested Grace half so much. Trenton was like a pilgrim from another and larger world; she was fascinated by the cosmopolitan fashion in which he changed the scene of his adventures from China to South Africa and from South America to far-flung islands whose very names were touched with the glamour of romance. Some of his journeys had been merely pleasure excursions; he got restless sometimes, he said, and had to go somewhere; but chiefly he had traveled to sell or to install machinery, or to work out mechanical problems under new and difficult conditions. There was no conceit in him—a vein of self-mockery ran through most of his talk. He made light of the perplexities and dangers he had encountered; there was no fun, he said, in the performance of easy tasks. He knew usually when he was employed that his services were sought in the hope that he might be able to solve riddles which other very capable persons had given up.

Grace studied him at leisure through his desultory monologue, interrupting only to ask questions to keep him assured of her interest. Her mind turned back repeatedly to what he had said of his wife. She was quite sure that Mrs. Trenton didn't appreciate her husband's fine qualities. He was a man of genius, and as such probably wasn't always easy to understand; but it was Mrs. Trenton's business, the girl reflected, to learn to understand him, to seek ways of making him happy. She was more and more struck by his seeming indifference to most things, even to his own achievements. Her imagination played upon

him with girlish romanticism. He ought to be aroused, awakened; he deserved to be loved, to have the companionship he craved. And yet from the manner in which he spoke of his wife it was a serious question whether he didn't love her. Whether the unknown woman loved him was another question that kept thrusting itself into her thoughts.

As he rambled on through the hour they were alone he played fitfully with the end of a gold locket which he carried on his watch chain. He would draw this from his right hand waistcoat pocket, seemingly unconscious of what he was doing, and hold it in his hand or smooth it caressingly. She speculated as to whether it did not contain a picture of Mrs. Trenton; she even considered asking him to let her see it.

Again steps and voices were heard above and Trenton looked at his watch.

"It's eleven o'clock and Tommy and I are taking the midnight train for St. Louis," he said. "We've got to beat it."

She rose and stood beside him, sorry that the evening was so nearly over.

"I'll always remember tonight; you've been awfully nice to me!" she said.

"Please don't! If you begin thanking me I'll know you feel I'm older than the hills. I see it all now! I made my story cover too many years!"

"Oh, that's not it at all!" she protested. "I was just wondering how you ever crowded so much into your young life!"

"You do that sort of thing very prettily! And when you look at me like that you become dangerous."

"You really don't think I'm dangerous—not in the least little bit!"

"I'm not to be caught in that trap! A wise man

never acknowledges to a woman that she's dangerous. They ought to have taught you that at the university. But you're patient! You've listened to me as Desdemona listened to Othello!"

"I believe," she said daringly, tilting her head, "I believe I'd like to flirt with you—oh, just a little bit!"

He took a step nearer, his hands thrust into his pockets in his characteristic way. He drew them out and they fell to his side as he regarded her fixedly with a smile on his lips. Then very gently he took her cheeks between his hands. She thrilled at the touch. They were fine strong hands; she had noted repeatedly all through the evening now finely formed they were, and the strength implied in them.

"It's meant very much to me to meet you—you can't know how much. I almost feel that I know you a little bit."

"It's meant so much more to me," she returned sincerely. "I'd be ashamed if I wasn't grateful. And that doesn't mean at all that I feel that you're a day older than I am!"

They were smiling gravely into each other's eyes. There was not for the moment at least any question of a disparity of years. She drew away slowly until her face was free of his touch; then she laid her hands lightly on his shoulders.

"Please kiss me," she whispered, and their lips met.

"Here, you two!"

They swung around to find Kemp in the door, watch in hand.

"We've just got time to make it. Your bag is at the station, Ward? All right. Go up and get your things, Grace. And tell Irene to hurry."

Kemp was again the man of business, his preoccupation with the journey already showing in his eyes.

Irene was giving the last touches to her hair when Grace found her.

"Ready in just a minute," she said. "How did you get on with good old Ward?"

"He's perfectly lovely! He's the most interesting man I ever met!"

"That's what they all say. Have any luck vamping him?"

"Of course not," replied Grace, putting on her hat. "You couldn't expect me to make a hit with a man like that. He's too big and much too wise."

"Oh, the wiser they are the harder they fall!" replied Irene carelessly. "It's something that he didn't leave you and go out for a walk all by his lonesome. That's the way he treated a girl I wished on him once. Actually, my dear, walked out of the house and didn't come back till Tommy and I were ready to go! But she got soused, the little fool. I guess I was lit up for a little while tonight and Tommy certainly was feeling his poison when Jerry put the wine away. He's all right now. It hits him quick and then it's all over."

Jerry appeared to bow them ceremoniously into the car. On the way into town they talked only fitfully. When the men spoke it was to discuss the business that was calling them to St. Louis.

"I'm going to Minne Lawton's for the night, Grace," said Irene. "You'd better stop there with me. It's easier doing that than explaining things at home. There won't be time for you to stop at Minnie's to change your things."

Grace had considered the possible embarrassment that might result from going home at midnight in the new gown. She meant to explain that she had changed before leaving the store and had gone home with Irene

after the French lesson, and some of Irene's friends had dropped in.

"Don't take a chance of being scolded," remarked Kemp. "You know your family and I suppose you have some leeway. I'd hate for you to get into trouble."

"Oh, I'll fix everything all right. It isn't so awfully late. I'll be home by twelve."

They dropped Irene at Minnie's and then swung westward. Grace indicated a point a block from home where they might leave her.

"If you like The Shack I hope you'll come again," said Kemp. "It's been fine to have you along."

"We'll meet again," said Trenton. "We didn't settle much! There'll have to be some more talks—many of them I hope!"

"I hope so too! Thank you both ever so much."

When she reached the Durland gate she caught a last glimpse of the tail light as the car swung southward round the park.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

She turned off the hall light at the switch at the head of the stairs and gained her room unchallenged. Usually her mother waited up for her, and Grace breathed a sigh of relief to find her door closed. She quickly undressed, hiding the new suit in the closet and throwing out another to wear to work in the morning.

She lay for nearly an hour thinking over the events of the night but slept at last the sleep of weary youth and was only roused by the importunate alarm clock at six-thirty. On her way to the bathroom for a shower—the shower had been a concession to her and Roy—she passed Ethel whose good morning she thought a little constrained. As she dressed she rehearsed the story she meant to tell to account for her late home-coming. Something would be said about it and she went downstairs whistling to fortify herself for the ordeal. Her father was reading the morning paper by the window in the living room and in response to her inquiry as to whether there was any news muttered absently that there was nothing in particular, the remark he always made when interrupted in the reading of his paper.

She found her mother and sister in the kitchen.

"Good morning, Grace," said Mrs. Durland pleasantly. "We're a little late, so you might set the table. Ethel and I have started breakfast."

Mrs. Durland usually made a point of setting the

breakfast table herself and Grace wondered whether this delegation of the task might not mean that her mother and Ethel wished to be alone to discuss just what should be said about her arrival at midnight when they had every reason to expect her home from her French lesson by half-past nine.

When they were established at the table Ethel praised the clear bright morning. It was her habit to say something hopeful and cheering at the breakfast table, illuminated at times by an appropriate quotation. Mrs. Durland encouraged this practice and if Ethel did not at once volunteer her contribution to the felicity of the matutinal meal, would ask:

"Ethel, haven't you some *word* for us this morning?"

Ethel had offered a quotation from Emerson and Grace had correctly guessed that it was from the essay on "Compensation" when Mrs. Durland, having filled and passed the coffee cups, glanced at Grace.

"What kept you so late last night, dear?" she asked in the kindest of tones. "I waited up till eleven. I didn't hear you come in. You must have been very late."

"Oh, I didn't get in until twelve. After the lesson I went home with Irene and there were some people there and we just talked and played cards. I didn't know the time was passing till it was after eleven."

"That's rather strange, dear. They didn't *know* at the Kirby's that you were at their house."

"Why didn't they know?" Grace demanded.

"Because we called up!" her mother answered. "John Moore's in town and telephoned about eight o'clock to know if he could come out. Ethel talked to him."

"He's such a fine fellow," said Ethel. "You know

mother and I met him when we went down to see you at the University last spring. He's such a splendid type!"

"The kind of high-minded, self-respecting young man we like to have you know, Grace," remarked Mrs. Durland.

"John's a dear," said Grace warmly. "And you told him to go to Professor Duroy's, and of course he didn't find me there."

"No; and he called a second time, thinking he had misunderstood. He was very anxious to get you to go with him to the football game tomorrow and was afraid you might make some other engagement. It was just a *little* embarrassing that we couldn't tell him where you were."

"You might have told him to come to the store in the morning," Grace replied. "Well, I guess I may as well make a clean breast of it! I played hooky! Irene and I went to a supper party."

"So you told me an untruth!" exclaimed Mrs. Durland, staring wide-eyed at the culprit. "Grace, this isn't like you. You should have told me you were not going to Professor Duroy's. You might have saved me my worry last night when you were so late and the Kirbys said Irene had not been home and that she told her family she was spending the night with a friend."

"Yes, mamma: I shouldn't have told you a fib. I'm sorry. It was a dreadful sin!"

She looked from one to the other smiling, hoping to dispel the gloom that seemed to hang above the table. It was not however in her sister's mind to suffer the deception to pass unrebuked.

"You'll tell us, I suppose, *whom* you had supper with besides Irene?"

Her sister's question angered Grace the more by reason of the tone of forbearance in which it was uttered. She would tell them nothing. A crisis had risen in her relations with her family and she resolved to meet it boldly.

"I'll not answer your question," she said, addressing herself directly to Ethel. "It's none of your business where I go or what I do. Ever since I came home I've been staying in at night except when I've gone to a movie with father. I'm working hard every day to help keep things going here at home. And I mean to keep on doing it; but I'm not a child and I'm not going to be checked up for every hour I'm out of your sight."

"Calm yourself, Grace. Don't say anything you'll be sorry for!" admonished Mrs. Durland.

"After I'd warned you about the Kirby girl—" began Ethel with the serene patience due an erring child who may yet be saved from further misdemeanors.

"Oh, you warned me all right enough!" Grace interrupted. "You've done a lot to make things pleasant for me since I came home! When I asked those girls here to the house you made everything as disagreeable as possible. You shied from a harmless ouija board! And now if I go out for an evening you're terribly shocked because I lie about it and refuse to tell you exactly where I've been! But I do refuse! I'm never going to tell you anything! The sooner you understand that, Ethel Durland, the sooner we'll have peace in this house."

Her eyes were bright with tears but she held her head high. In so far as she reasoned at all in her anger she was satisfied that justice was on her side. She was of age, she was self-supporting, she was bear-

ing her full share of the family expenses, and she meant to establish once and for all her right to freedom.

"I hadn't expected you to take the matter in this spirit," said Mrs. Durland. "It isn't like you, Grace. We want the very best for you. We want you to have your friends and to enjoy yourself. And be sure we all appreciate the fine way you met your disappointment at being obliged to give up college. But you know we owe it to you, dear, to protect you in every way possible. There are so many perils these days."

"Not only here, but everywhere through the country, the moral conditions are terrible," said Ethel plaintively. "A young girl can't be too careful."

"Well, if I'm wicked your goodness more than makes up for it," Grace flashed back; and then, her anger mounting, "Why do you assume that I've been wicked? Are you going to take my character away from me right here at home? If I've got to live here in an atmosphere of suspicion I'll leave. I can easily find another boarding place where I won't be pecked at all the time."

"You wouldn't think of doing that!" cried her mother aghast. "This is your home, dear; it will always be your home. We should be so grateful that we've been able to keep the dear old place."

"Well, you're making me think of it! If I go you'll be driving me out!"

"No one has any intention of driving you from home," said Ethel. "We want to guard you with our faith and love."

"Your faith!" Grace laughed ironically.

"Of course we have all the faith in the world in you!" declared Mrs. Durland.

Stephen Durland, who had remained silent during this discussion, was now folding his napkin. He cleared his throat, glanced from his wife to his daughters and back to his wife.

"Seems to me this has gone far enough, Alicia. There's no use acting as though Grace had done anything wrong."

"Of course we didn't mean that, Stephen," said Mrs. Durland quickly. "It was *only*——"

The fact that Durland so rarely expressed an opinion on any matter pertaining to family affairs had so surprised her that she found herself unequal to the task of completing her sentence.

"I guess it's a good place to let the matter drop," he said. "The way to show Grace we trust her is to trust her. Twelve o'clock is not late. I heard Grace when she came in. I don't blame her for not answering questions when she's jumped on. Don't nag Grace. Grace is all right."

This was the longest speech Stephen Durland had delivered in a family council for years. He rose, paused to drain the glass of water at his plate and left the room. A moment later the front door closed very softly. The gentleness with which it closed had curiously the effect of an emphasis upon his last words. They waited to give him time to reach the gate. Having broken one precedent he might break another; he might come back. He had even addressed his wife as Alicia instead of the familiar Allie—a radical and disconcerting departure.

"We may as well clear the table," said Mrs. Durland, when a full minute had passed. Grace assisted in the clearing up. All the processes of this labor were executed in silence save for an occasional deep sigh from Mrs. Durland. When the dishes had been

washed and put away in the pantry Grace hung up her apron and went to her room. She made her bed and straightened up her dressing table and had put on her hat and coat when Ethel appeared in the door.

"Grace, I want you to know how sorry I am if I said anything to hurt you. You know that not for worlds would I be unkind or unjust to my own sister."

"Oh, that's all right, Ethel; just forget it," Grace replied indifferently.

She bade her mother good-bye with all the cheer she could muster.

"Good-bye, Grace," called Mrs. Durland from the window where she was scanning the newspaper. "I hope you'll have a good day."

"Thank you, mother."

II

As the trolley bore her townward she decided that all things considered she had come off fairly well in the encounter; but she was not jubilant. She had probably established her right to go and come as she pleased, but the victory brought her no happiness. Ethel's conciliatory words meant nothing; it was her sister's way to manifest forbearance and tolerance, to smoothe things over when there had been a clash between them. Grace had for her mother a real affection, sincerely admiring the effort she made to keep in touch with the best thought of the world—a pet phrase of Mrs. Durland's. Mrs. Durland was kind, unselfish, well-meaning. She meant to live up to her ideal of motherhood. It was despicable to lie to her. Grace's conscience was now

busy tearing down the defenses behind which she had excused herself for going to Kemp's party. Any uncertainty as to Irene's relations with the manufacturer were dispelled by the visit to The Shack. The fact that Kemp's money made it possible to surround the relationship with a degree of glamour did not mitigate the ugly fact. It might be that the people who talked so dolefully of the new generation and the low ebb to which old fashioned morals had sunk were right. Irene's affair with Kemp presented a situation which, if greatly multiplied, would mean the destruction of all that made womanhood precious.

Could she, Grace Durland, ever be like that? What was to prevent her from doing exactly what Irene was doing or falling even lower? Nothing, she pondered, but her own will and innate sense of righteousness. She would have no excuse for following Irene's example. The home she had just left really stood for all those things she had been taught to believe were essential to right living. Her mother, with all her failings and weaknesses, had labored hard to implant in her children the principles of honor and rectitude. And her father, pitiful figure though he was, was a man of ideals and a pattern of morality. He believed in her; he was her friend and it would be shameful to do aught to bring disgrace upon him. And with an accession of generosity as she pondered, Grace saw Ethel, too, in a different light. With all her offensive assumption of saintly airs Ethel's ideas of human conduct were sound. Ethel was a disagreeable person to live with, but nevertheless she was not always wrong. She had indubitably been right about Irene Kirby.

As Grace left the car she saw by a street clock that she still had ten minutes in which to report at

the store and she loitered, eager to remain in the open as long as possible. And she rather dreaded meeting Irene.

III

Happily for her peace of mind the day opened briskly. She had disposed of a rapid succession of customers before Irene, who had arrived late, passed her in the salesroom with a careless nod and smile. At half-past nine Grace espied John Moore, the unwitting cause of the exposure of her truancy from the French class, standing in the entrance. So many other thoughts had filled her mind since she left the breakfast table that she had forgotten about Moore and the football game. She was carrying a gown she had just sold flung over her arm when the sight of the young man, who was clearly dismayed by the unfamiliar scene, brought a smile to her face. He sprang forward beaming when he caught sight of her.

"I was just about to run; I'm scared to death!" he exclaimed.

In his joy at finding her he dropped his hat as he grasped her hand. He was big of frame but trained fine, and the deep tan of his summer on a Kansas farm had not yet worn off. His gray suit was only saved from shabbiness by a recent careful pressing. His lean cheeks were neatly shaven and his thick brown hair was evenly parted and smoothly brushed, though a wisp of it persisted in slipping down over his forehead. Twenty-seven or thereabouts, John Barton Moore—as he was written on the university books—seemed older with the maturity of one who begins early to plan and fashion his life.

"I'm awfully glad to see you, John!" she cried. "Up for the game, of course! I was terribly sorry not to be home when you called. The trouble was that I cut my French lesson at the last minute to go to a party."

"Perfectly all right, Grace. I ought to have written you a note to say I was coming up."

He glanced about anxiously. "Am I blocking the wheels of commerce?" he asked with the drawl that proclaimed him one of those children of Indiana whose ancestors reached the Wabash country by way of North Carolina and Kentucky.

"Nothing like that! Just a minute till I send this dress to be packed."

She motioned him to a chair but he remained standing like a soldier at attention till she came back.

"Now then! Let's proceed to business."

"Well, I. U. needs all her children to root this afternoon, though I think we're going to win. And you've got to go. Got good seats and everything's all set."

"Why, John, I'm afraid I can't go. Saturdays are busy days here. I don't like to ask to get off."

"Oh, you can fix it somehow. And besides I want to talk. I've got about a million things to tell you. You left in such a hurry I didn't know you were gone till Roy told me the next day. I've certainly missed our talks."

"Well, we'll have some more; I'm starving for a talk with you!"

"Well, this is a fearsome place and I mustn't keep you. So please see your boss and tell him or her this is a matter of life and death."

At this moment Irene swept by with a valued customer and Grace appealed to her.

"Miss Kirby, Mr. Moore. Irene, Mr. Moore is an old friend of mine from I. U. and he wants me to go to the game. Would I be shot if I asked to get off?"

Irene surveyed Moore carefully and weighed the question for an instant.

"What do I get if I fix it?" she asked, giving the young man the benefit of her handsome eyes.

"I might offer a bushel of hickory-nuts," said Moore. "I counted a lot on seeing the game with Grace."

"I think," said Irene with mock gravity, "I *think* it can be arranged. Miss Boardman sent word this morning that she's ill and won't be down, so I'm in charge. We're likely to have a busy afternoon, but you run along, Grace."

"Well, that's mighty nice of you, Miss Kirby"; and Moore thrust out his hand. It was evidently his habit to express all manner of emotion with a handshake. He was regarding Irene with a frank curiosity manifest in his steady gray eyes. The grand manner of the Irenes of the world, one would have assumed, was new to him.

"I wish you could go along too," he said. "It's likely to be a lively scrap. If you say the word, Miss Kirby, I'll get another seat right away."

"Oh, thank you so much! But with Miss Boardman away it can't be done. It's nice of you to ask me though."

If she was to him a puzzling type, alien to all his experience, he was equally of an unfamiliar species to her. Grace noted with secret amusement the interest they apparently awakened in each other.

"Excuse me; I must run along," said Irene. "Have a good time!" She left them with her queenliest air.

"I told you it could be fixed all right," said Moore. "Fine girl; Miss Kirby."

"It was mighty nice of her to do it. I'd hardly have had the nerve to tackle Miss Boardman."

"Well, I mustn't keep you. There's lots of folks on the streets. Looks like the whole of the grand old Hoosier State was in town. Where can I meet you?"

"At the main entrance of this emporium at one o'clock. You get your lunch first and I'll snatch something in the tea room. We'll want to get out early to see the crowd gather. I'm that thrilled, John!"

Grace greeted her next customer with a smile that was not wholly inspired by the hope of making a substantial sale. John had been one of her best friends at the university, where everyone knew and liked him. Even the governor of the State knew Moore and referred to him indirectly in public addresses as a justification for taxing the people to place higher education within reach of the humblest.

Moore was born on a farm and his parents dying just as he finished the common schools, he had worked his way through college, doing chores during the school terms and spending his vacations on farms wherever employment offered. In like fashion he was now plodding his way through the law school. His good humor was unfailing and his drolleries were much quoted in the university town. When urged in his undergraduate days to take up football he pleaded important engagements, not scrupling to explain that they were the most solemn pledges to saw wood or cut grass for his clients or drive the truck on Saturdays for a grocer. He called his employers his noble patrons and praised them for their consideration and generosity. He enjoyed music, and possessing a good

baritone voice he had been enrolled in the glee club. He never had danced until, in his senior year, a number of co-eds conspired to instruct him. He was the star performer of the debating society and had several times represented the university in the contests of the Inter-State Association.

Though she had so quickly overcome her disappointment at leaving the University, Grace found that the sight of Moore awoke in her a keen regret that her college days were over. She was far less sure of herself than she had been before her evening at The Shack. She clutched at memories of her happy care-free yesterdays. A band in the street was playing the air of the college song, which was punctuated by the familiar yell from the throats of a mighty phalanx of undergraduates. Young women from all the state colleges were coming into the store for hurried purchases. Two members of her sorority, girls she had lived with for two years, dropped in to see her—cheery, hopeful young women, eagerly flinging at her scraps of college news and giving a sharper edge to her homesickness for the campus and all it connoted. She was beset with serious doubts as to her fitness to meet the problems of life; the conceit was gone out of her. She recalled what a lecturer had once said at a student's convocation, that the great commonwealth of Indiana stood behind them, eager to serve them, to put them in the way of realizing the abundant promise of life. In her mood of contrition she reflected that not only had the arm of the State been withdrawn, but that she had gone far toward estranging those to whom she was bound by the closest ties, who had every right to expect the best of her. If it had been in her power she would have elected to join the throng of young men and women who, victor or van-

quished, would go back to the university that night singing songs which echoed in her memory now and made a continuing little ache in her heart.

Moore's pride in her was manifest as he hung to a strap and bent over her in the crowded street car on the way to the battlefield. Grace was a pretty girl, and John was not unmindful of the fact that she attracted attention. He talked steadily—of university affairs, of their friends among the students.

"Did Roy come up?" she asked.

"I haven't seen him. He may have come up with the bunch this morning. But you might overlook the king of England in this crowd."

"Roy's not terribly enthusiastic about the law," she suggested leadingly.

"Well, maybe not just what you'll call crazy about it; but he'll come along all right. There's good stuff in Roy."

Moore was usually so candid that his equivocal answer did not escape her. Grace had the greatest misgivings as to her brother's future. He had wanted to leave the university when she was summoned home. He had won his A. B. by the narrowest margin and had gone into the law school only because of his mother's obsession that he was destined to a career similar to that of her father and grandfather, whose attainments at the bar and services to the State provided what Mrs. Durland called a background for her children.

IV

Arriving early at the ball park they found their seats and John continued talking as the crowd as-

sembled. On many Sunday afternoons they had taken long tramps, discussing all manner of things. Moore was a prodigious reader of poetry and made it his practice to commit to memory a certain number of lines every day. Politics, too, interested him seriously. He always spoke with deepest reverence of the founders of the republic, referring to them familiarly as though they were still living. Between the cheers to which he vociferously contributed his own voice, he rambled on comfortably and happily, satisfied that he had a sympathetic auditor.

"There's Bill Trumbull—hello there, Bill! Well, to tell the truth, Grace, I don't get much out of this new poetry. Flimsy stuff; doesn't satisfy you somehow. The times call for another old Walt Whitman. That bird had ideas. He certainly hit some grand old truths. 'Produce great men,' he says; 'the rest follows.' Just as easy! Wow! There's our team coming out now!" (prolonged cheering) "Well, there's the old saying that the time brings the man. Can't tell but there's a future president right here in this crowd!"

"It might be you, John!" remarked Grace, laughing at the serenity with which he returned to his subject after joining in the uproar.

"No, Grace; I've chosen the chief justiceship!" he said, swinging round at her. "Isn't that Daisy Martin?—Fred Ragsdale with her. Hello, Fred! and if, there aint old Pop Streeter! Greetings Pop! No, sir; the times call for men and we're going to produce a fine new crop right out of this generation here present."

Moore was enjoying himself; there was no question of it. And Grace was experiencing a grateful sense

of security in John's company. He was paying her his highest compliment, and she knew that the money for his excursion to the capital had been earned by his own labor. Her girl friends at the university had tormented her a good deal about John's attentions, which were marked by the shy deference and instinctive courtesy with which he treated all women. He was not a person to be flirted with; Grace had never in the prevalent phrase "teased him along." She respected him too much for that, and, moreover, he was not fair game. Any attempt to practice on him the usual cajoleries and coquetries would have sent him away running. When a girl visitor at the university, meeting John at a dance, had referred to him as a hick, Grace had resented it on the spot, informing the surprised offender that John Moore was the finest gentleman on the campus.

John was not wholly silenced by the spirited opening of the game.

"Too bad Crump's not here. Hurt his leg last week in practice. Thought he'd make it. Break his heart not to be in the game. Thompson in his place. You know Thompy? He's a wonder on the trap drum. Wow! Illinois got the ball. Where was I? Oh, yes! I read Landor last summer—Walter Savage; a theological student from New York, working along with me out in Kansas, put me on to Landor. Quite a man—Landor, I mean. The theolog's a bully chap, too, for that matter. Look at that! No; sending 'em back. Wow! That's first blood for us! Well, you might like Landor if you took a whack at him. That referee's awful fussy. Wonder where they got him. Remember that day we read 'The Passing of Arthur,' sitting on a log by that gay little creek in the woods? I've thought a lot about that and the way

you *cried.* Yes; you did, Grace; and I guess I shed a few tears myself! . . ."

In moments of despair when Indiana's fortunes were low, John's optimism evoked laughter from his neighbors, for he possessed in good measure the homely humor which is indigenous to the corn belt.

Before the game ended it had occurred to Grace to ask John to go home with her for supper. After they had joined in the demonstration for the victorious Hoosier team and had made their way to the street she went into a drugstore and called her mother on the telephone. Mrs. Durland replied cordially that she would be delighted to see John; it was too late to put on any extras but any friend of Grace's was always welcome. It would serve to ease the situation she had left behind her to take John home, Grace reflected, and moreover, she was glad of an excuse for seeing more of him.

"Of course I'll be glad to break bread with you. I'll be glad to see your folks again. If you're not too tired, let's walk. Fine zippy air! Well, that was sure some game! I nearly died an unnatural death about seven times in the last quarter, but we managed to pull through. Let's see, what were we talking about?"

He let her into a great secret as they crossed the park toward the Durland house. He had seen Judge Sanders, the senior member of one of the best law firms in the capital and a university trustee, who had offered to take him into his office.

"Wants me to come in January," John explained. "Says they'll guarantee my board and keep for running errands and attending to collections; and I can go on studying and be ready for my exams in the spring just the same. So I'll be in the city for keeps

after Christmas. Grand man, the Judge. Found I was washing automobiles at night to pay for my room over Westlake's garage and he just couldn't stand it. There's a friend, I say!"

He waited for her to laugh and laughed with her. It was enormously funny that among other jobs he washed automobiles on his way to the chief justiceship!

"Nothing can keep you back, John. You're like the men we read about, who strike right out for the top and get there and plant their flag on the battlements."

"Don't say a word! There's luck as well as hard work in this business of getting on. All summer I used to think about it—out in the fields in Kansas. A big, hot harvest field's a grand place for healthy thought. I say, Grace, life's a lot more complicated than it used to be. Things all sort o' mixed up since the war."

"You really believe the world's so different, John? Everybody's saying that and the papers and magazines are full of stuff about the changes and knocking our generation."

"Don't let that talk throw you! It's up to all of us to sit tight on the toboggan and wait till she slows down. There's a lot of good in this grand old world yet. By the way, it was hard luck you had to quit college. Excuse me for mentioning it, but I just wanted you to know I was sorry you left."

"Oh, it's all right, John. I miss the good times but there's no use crying. I'm ashamed now, though, to think how I just fooled along. I ought to have got more out of it than I did."

"You don't know how much you got," he replied quickly. "Kind of a mystery what we get and what

we don't. We got to keep braced for anything we bump into. When the war came along I thought that was the end of me so far as going into the law was concerned, but being shot at by the Kaiser sort o' made me mad. I wasn't going to let a little thing like that stop me; so my life being providentially spared, I thought it all out on the ship coming home—on the deck at night with the stars blinking at me. I've got health and a fair second-rate head and I'm going to give the world a good wrestle before I quit."

"Fine!" she exclaimed, noting the lifting of his head as he swung along in the gathering dusk. "You make me ashamed of myself, John. I think I've begun to drift—I don't know what I'm headed for."

"We all think we're drifting when we're not!" It's in the back of our minds all the time that we're aiming for something," he replied; "we don't fool ourselves there!"

"I hope you're right," she said, pensively. "But I've wondered a lot lately about myself. Do you suppose there's anything wrong with me—lack of ambition, maybe?"

He paused abruptly the more emphatically to dispose of her question, which had a deeper meaning than he knew.

"Don't be foolish, Grace! You could keep up your college work if you wanted to—there's a way of doing that, and get your degree. Suppose you thought of that—and teaching?"

"Yes. But I don't feel any strong pull that way. I'm in a French class and I mean to keep that up. But before I was off the campus I was all keyed up to jump right into things. I want experiences—not teaching or anything like that—but to be as close to the heart of things as I can get!"

"Not a bit of fault with that! I'd trust you to find yourself anywhere. You're too fine a girl ever to get lost in the shuffle. I guess you'll learn a lot in Shipley's; you see all kinds of people there every day, and as Aleck Pope says the proper study of mankind is man—also woman!"

In spite of herself the unhappiness with which the day had begun had stolen into her heart again. It had betrayed itself in her speech, the eagerness with which she appealed to Moore for approval and sympathy. She was contrasting what he was saying with what Trenton had said the previous night. No two men could be more unlike—Trenton the man of the world, with a hint of cynicism in his attitude toward life; John Moore, a son of the soil, with all his ideals intact, viewing life with hope and confidence.

V

Grace had not been mistaken in thinking that John's presence would exert a cheering influence on the household. It was clearly written in the faces of Mrs. Durland and Ethel that they believed Grace was not beyond redemption so long as she was capable of appreciating the sterling worth of a high minded and ambitious young man like Moore. John was not without a sense of the fitness of things. When Mrs. Durland and Ethel showed a disposition to maintain the conversation on lofty heights John indulged them for a time and then concentrated upon Stephen Durland. Farm machinery seemed to John a subject likely to interest the silent head of the house. Durland was soon painstakingly answering Moore's questions as to the possibility of further reducing the man power required in crop production.

"I've hopped the clods since I could reach a plow handle," said John, " and it does seem to me that with the tractor coming in——"

Durland delivered what amounted to a condensed lecture on the subject, spurred on by John's sincere interest and practical questions.

"Thank you, Mr. Durland. I've been wanting to get an expert opinion on those points for a long time. I tell you," he said glancing round at the others, "it does tickle me to run into a man who really *knows*."

"Father's an authority on those things," said Grace proudly. "He reads everything that's written on mechanics."

"Stephen *ought* to know!" remarked Mrs. Durland with a sigh which Grace translated as signifying that it was too bad that his knowing really profited him so little.

"We're so sorry," said Mrs. Durland, when the cold ham, baked potatoes and canned peas had received attention and Ethel brought in a bread pudding —"it's a great grief to all of us that Grace had to leave college. It meant so much to her. But her spirit about it all has been fine."

"Well," remarked John, after he had met Ethel's apology for the pudding with the assurance that it was his favorite of all desserts—"Well, I'm not sure it isn't a good thing for Grace to go into business for awhile. I argue that things somehow work out for good in the long run. Her English and the sociology courses were what interested her most; and being in a big place like Shipley's and running into all sorts and conditions of folks the way she's got to is bound to have a broadening effect. It's right along the line of things she's keenest about."

"But, Mr. Moore, what we don't like is the unfortunate contacts with people who may not be—*wholly* desirable acquaintances," suggested Ethel.

Grace frowned. It was ungracious of Ethel to draw John into the discussion of a subject that had been a matter of contention in the family. But John, having convinced Mrs. Durland of his appreciation of her hospitality by accepting a second helping of the pudding, met the situation promptly.

"Well, now Miss Durland, who's going to draw the line between the desirable and undesirable? Now I'm not saying that we haven't a right to choose our friends; but for me, I like all kinds. Why, on that farm in Kansas where I slept in the hay mow for the sake of the ventilation and to study the constellations through the cracks, a fugitive burglar crawled in one night and we nearly scared each other to death! But I made a friend of that poor chap. Tucked him away and fed him for a couple of days. Had a letter from him last week. He's away up in Canada working in a lumber camp. Now sleeping in the hay with that poor devil didn't do me any harm. Maybe I did him some good! He swore he wasn't guilty, so my conscience was easy about not calling up the sheriff and turning him over. Give everybody the benefit of the doubt; that's my idea!"

It was not Ethel's way to give any one the benefit of the doubt. Mr. Durland covered a queer little chuckle by pretending to cough. Grace tried to change the subject; but Ethel was not to be thwarted in her attempt to elicit from John an expression of disapproval of Grace's course in becoming a salesgirl.

"That's a good story, Mr. Moore, but when you think of a girl like Grace, being *numbered* and put

in with girls who've had nothing like her advantages —that's what I meant. Not that Grace won't be equal to the test, but——"

"Well," John interrupted, "I've never been in these big stores much but this morning while I was trying to get my eye on Grace I saw all those girls stepping round and I thought what a fine looking lot they were! And all busy and right on the job! Now there's that Miss Kirby—was that the name, Grace?"

"Yes," Grace answered, strongly inclined to giggle, now that the innocent and well-meaning John had brought Irene to the table.

"You take a girl like that," said John warming to his work, "moving around like a duchess, and with that way about her that makes you *know* she's onto her job! I'll bet there's lots of 'em just like her. I say you've got to hand it to 'em. I tell you, Mrs. Durland, while we've got girls like Miss Kirby and Grace Durland I'll say America's safe! Wasn't it nice, Grace, the way Miss Kirby fixed it for you to get off. You could see she was pleased clear through to have the authority!"

"I don't think—" began Ethel; but scenting battle, Mrs. Durland rose from the table.

"You and Mr. Moore go into the parlor, Grace. Ethel and I will straighten up out here."

"Not on your tin-type!" John protested. "I just love to dry dishes. You just let me take a hand. I'll pay for every plate I smash!"

As he refused to be denied Grace found an apron for him and they made merry over the dishwashing.

While they were in the midst of it Ethel came to the door to say that Grace was wanted on the telephone. Ethel's manner of conveying the information prepared Grace for Irene's voice.

"Can you talk a minute? I had a telegram from some friends of ours this afternoon. They wanted to be remembered to you; that's all. I think your particular friend will stop on his way east. Tell me, did you get in bad?"

"Oh, it's all right now," Grace replied. "I've got company and we mustn't talk."

"I understand perfectly. I'm spending an evening at home for a change and I just thought I'd let you know our gay cavaliers hadn't forgotten us. Is your company exciting?"

"Just nice. You met him this morning."

"I'd guessed it. And you took him home for supper, like the good little girl you are! Well, it's a joy to meet one of the unvarnished occasionally. I may try to take him away from you; just hand him that!"

CHAPTER SIX

I

THE repentant mood induced by the spectacle of the football game and John Moore's visit still lay upon Grace the next morning when she went down to the Durland eight o'clock Sunday breakfast.

"I'm sorry you hurried down," said her mother cheerily. "I don't want you girls to come into the kitchen Sunday mornings; you're both tired from your week's work and I want you to make the Sabbath a real day of rest."

"Oh, I'm for getting up when I wake up," Grace answered. "I'm feeling fine. Let me do the toast, Ethel. I just love toasting."

She led the talk at the table, recurring to the football game, exploring the newspaper for the sporting page to clarify her impressions of certain points in the contest.

"John was simply a scream! He talked of everything under the sun. You might have thought he didn't want me to know what was going on at all!"

John was the safest of topics; they had all liked him; and Grace related many stories illustrative of the young man's determination to refuse no task by which he could earn the dollars he needed to lodge, clothe and feed himself while gaining his education. Now that they had seen him at their own table they could the better enjoy Grace's enumeration of John's sturdy qualities.

This was the happiest breakfast the Durlands had

known since Grace came home. It was in her heart to do her full share in promoting the cheer of the household. The unfortunate revelation of her duplicity of Friday night would no doubt be forgotten if she behaved herself; and she had no intention of repeating the offense. Nevertheless she was glad that she had asserted herself. It had done no harm to declare her right to independent action and the exercise of her own judgment in the choice of friends; she would have had no peace, she assured herself, if she hadn't taken a stand against an espoinage that would have been intolerable. She persuaded herself that her mother and sister were treating her with much more respect now that she had shown that she couldn't be frightened or cowed by their criticisms.

Before breakfast was over Ethel asked quite casually whether Grace wouldn't go to church with her, and Mrs. Durland promptly approved the invitation.

"You can go as well as not, Grace. Ethel has her Sunday school class first, but she can meet you right afterwards. I don't want you girls bothering with the Sunday dinner."

Grace didn't question that this matter had been canvassed privately by Ethel and her mother; very likely it had been Ethel's suggestion; but she decided instantly that it would be good policy to go. Her church-going had always been desultory and her mother had ceased to insist on it. But the situation called for a concession on her part.

"Why, yes; thank you ever so much, Ethel," she said. "I haven't been in ages. I'd meant to do some sewing but that can wait."

"I think," said Mrs. Durland, "we all need the help and inspiration of the church. Stephen, wouldn't you like to go with the girls? I don't believe you've

ever heard Dr. Ridgley; he's very liberal and a stimulating speaker."

Durland mumbled an incoherent rejection of the idea; then looked up from his reading to explain that he had some things to attend to at the shop. There was nothing surprising in the explanation. He always went to his shop on Sunday mornings. Even in the old days of his identification with Cummings-Durland he had betaken himself every Sunday to the factory to ponder his problems.

II

As the congregation assembled Grace yielded herself to the spell of the organ, whose inspiring strains gave wings to her imagination. Always impressionable, she felt that she had brought her soul humbled and chastened into the sanctuary. Here were the evidences of those more excellent things that had been pointed out to her from her earliest youth. The service opened spiritedly with the singing of a familiar hymn which touched chords in her heart that had long been silent. She joined in the singing and in the responsive reading of a selection of the Psalms. She had read somewhere that the church, that Christianity indeed, was losing its hold upon the mind and the conscience of mankind. But this church was filled; many men and women must still be finding a tangible help in the precepts and example of Jesus.

Ethel, sitting beside her, certainly found here something that brought her back Sunday after Sunday, and made her a zealous helper in the church activities. Bigoted and intolerant, unkind and ungenerous as Ethel was, there was something in her devotion to the church that set her a little apart, spoke for something

fine in her, that for the moment caused Grace a twinge of envy. In her early youth she had "joined" the West End church that her mother attended; but before she left high school the connection had ceased to interest her. Dr. Ridgley's congregation was composed largely of the prosperous and well-to-do. Did these people about her really order their lives in keeping with the teachings of Jesus? Was the Christian life a possible thing? Were these women in their smart raiment really capable of living in love and charity with their neighbors, eager to help, to serve, to save? Absorbed in her own thoughts she missed the text; found herself studying the minister, a young man of quiet manner and pleasing voice. Then detached sentences arrested her truant thoughts, and soon she was giving his utterances her complete attention.

. . . "Leaving God out of the question," he was saying, "what excuse have we to offer ourselves if we fail to do what we know to be right? We must either confess to a weakness in our own fibre, or lay the burden on some one else. We must be either captain or slave. . . . We hear much about the changed spirit of the time. It is said that the old barricades no longer shield us from evil; that the checks upon our moral natures are broken down; that many of the old principles of uprightness and decent living have been superseded by something new, which makes it possible for us to do very much as we please without harm to our souls. Let us not be deceived by such reasoning. There's altogether too much talk about the changes that are going on. There are no new temptations; they merely wear a new guise. The soul and its needs do not change; the God who ever lives and loves does not change. . . . There's a

limit upon our capacity for self-deception. We may think we are free, but at a certain point we find that after all we are the prisoners of conscience.

"The business of life is a series of transactions between the individual soul and God. We can change that relationship only by our own folly. We can deceive ourselves with excuses; but the test of an excuse is whether it will pass muster with God. God is not mocked; we can't 'just get by' with God. We may be sure that we are pretty close to a realization of the Christian life when we feel that we have an excuse for any sin or failure that we dare breathe into a prayer. There's hope for all of us as long as our sins are such that we're not ashamed to carry them to God. . . . Let us live on good terms with ourselves first of all and with God be the rest. Let us keep in harmony with that power above us and beyond us which in all ages has made for righteousness." . . .

The minister was uttering clearly and forcibly the thoughts that had been creeping through her own mind like tired heralds feebly crying warning to a threatened fortress. Captain or slave, that was the question. She had told Trenton that she was afraid of the answers to vexed problems of life and conduct. She saw now the cowardice of this. Her intelligence she knew to be above the average, and her conscience had within twenty-four hours proved itself to be uncomfortably sensitive and vigilant. There might be breaks in the old moral barriers but if this were really true it would be necessary for her to stumble over the debris to gain the inviting freedom of the territory beyond. No; there would be no excuse for her if she failed to fashion something fine and noble of her life.

In the vestibule Ethel introduced her to the minister, who greeted her warmly and praised Ethel; she was one of his standbys he said. While he and Ethel were conferring about some matter connected with the young people's society Grace was accosted by a lady whom she identified at once as her first customer at Shipley's.

"Do I know you or not?" demanded Miss Reynolds pleasantly. "Hats make such a difference, but I thought I recognized you. I've been away so many years that I look twice at every one I meet. I was caught in England by the war and just stayed on. It gives you a queer feeling to find yourself a stranger in your native town. It was silly of me to stay away so long. Well, how are things going with you?"

"Just fine," Grace answered, noting that Miss Reynolds wore one of the suits she had sold her, and looked very well in it.

The old lady (the phrase was ridiculous in the case of one so alert and spirited) caught the glance; indeed nothing escaped the bright eyes behind Beulah Reynolds' spectacles. She bent toward Grace and whispered: "This suit's very satisfactory!" And then: "Well, we've caught each other in a good place. My grandfather was one of the founders of this church, so I dropped in to have a look. Haven't seen more than a dozen people I used to know. There was a good deal of sense in that sermon; the best I've heard in years. They don't scatter fire and brimstone the way they used to."

One would have thought from her manner that she was enormously relieved to find that fire and brimstone had been abandoned as a stimulus to the Christian life.

"I'm not a member," said Grace, "but my sister

is. I never heard Dr. Ridgley before. I liked his sermon; I think I needed it."

Grace was smiling but something a little wistful in her tone caused Miss Reynolds to regard her with keen scrutiny.

"Do you know, you've come into my mind frequently since our meeting at the store? I've thought of you—uncommercially, I mean, if that's the way to put it! I'd like to know you better."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Reynolds; I've thought of you, too, and have hoped you'd come into Shipley's again."

"Oh, clothes don't interest me a particle; I may not visit Shipley's again for years! But that doesn't mean I shan't see you. I wonder if you'd come to my house some evening for dinner—just ourselves. Would that bore you?"

"It certainly wouldn't!" Grace responded smilingly.

"The sooner the better then! Tomorrow evening shall we say? Don't think of dressing. Come direct from your work. Here's my address on this card. I'll send my motor for you."

"Please don't trouble to do that! I can easily come out on the street car."

"Suit yourself. It's almost like kidnapping and—it just occurs to me that I don't really know your name!" Her ignorance of Grace's name greatly amused Miss Reynolds. "For all you know this might be a scheme to snare you to my house and murder you!"

"I'll cheerfully take the chance!" laughed Grace, and gave her name. The minister had now finished with Ethel, and Grace introduced her sister to Miss Reynolds, who did not, however, include Ethel in her invitation to dinner.

"She charmingly eccentric," Ethel remarked as

Miss Reynolds turned away. "And awfully rich; one of the richest woman taxpayers in the state.

"Yes; I understand she is," said Grace without enthusiasm. "But we needn't hold that against her." And then, recalling Ethel's complacent tone in mentioning any social recognition by her church friends, Grace remarked carelessly, "She's invited me to dine with her tomorrow night. I'm to be the only guest. She seems to have a crush on me!"

At the midday dinner Ethel disclosed Miss Reynolds' partiality for Grace with all impressiveness.

"Why, Grace!" exclaimed Mrs. Durland, "do you fully *appreciate* what that means?"

"It means that a very nice lady has invited me to share her dinner," Grace answered.

"I hope you realize," said Ethel, "what a great compliment that is. Why, she can do worlds for you!"

"Here's hoping she keeps a good cook!" Grace retorted, irritated that they were attributing so much importance to what she preferred to look upon as no more than an act of spontaneous kindness in a generous hearted woman.

"Miss Reynolds represents the old conservative element here," Mrs. Durland remarked in a tone that implied her deep reverence for that element of the population—"the people who always stood for the best things of life. Her father was a colonel in the Civil War. They always had money. A woman like that can make herself *felt*. Now that she's back, I hope she'll see that she has a work to do. She has no ties and with her position and wealth she can make herself a power for good in checking the evil tendencies so apparent in our city."

"She's so quaint; so deliciously old-fashioned," added Ethel, "and you can see from her clothes that

she's an independent character. I'm going to ask Dr. Ridgely to invite her to take the chairmanship of our girl's club committee."

"That would be splendid, Ethel," exclaimed Mrs. Durland, "perhaps *you* could say a word to her about it, Grace. You know better than Ethel the dangers and temptations of the girl wage-earner."

"I don't know why I should," Grace replied. "Please don't talk to me as though I had a monopoly of all the wickedness in the world."

"Grace, dear, I didn't *mean*——"

"All right, mother. But I have my feelings, you know."

"The old Reynolds house on Meridian Street has been turned into a garage," said Ethel; "it's too bad those old homes had to go. Miss Reynolds has bought a house not far from where Bob Cummings built."

Any mention of the Cummingses, no matter how inadvertent, inevitably precipitated a discussion of that family from some angle. Mrs. Durland said for the hundredth time that they didn't deserve their prosperity; she doubted very much whether they were happy.

"Bob's the best one of the family," she continued. "Tom and Merwin haven't amounted to anything and they never will. It must have been a blow to the family when Merwin married a girl who was nobody, or worse. She worked in some automobile office."

Ethel challenged the statement that the girl Merwin Cummings married worked in an automobile office. It was a railroad office, and though it didn't matter particularly with which method of transportation the young woman was identified before her marriage, Mrs. Durland and Ethel debated the question for several minutes. Mrs. Durland had only heard

somewhere that Mrs. Merwin Cummings had been a stenographer for an automobile agent while Ethel was positive that a railroad office had been the scene of the girl's labors, her authority being another girl who worked in the same place.

"Jessie didn't speak any too highly of her," Ethel added; "not that there was anything *really* wrong with the girl. She ran around a good deal, and usually had two or three men on the string."

"A good many very nice girls keep two or three men on the string," said Grace. "I don't see that there's anything so terrible in that."

III

The next day at noon Grace went to a trust company where she kept an account that represented the aggregate of small gifts of cash she had received through a number of years at Christmas and on her birthdays. As she waited at the window for her passbook, Bob Cummings crossed the lobby on his way to the desk of one of the officers. She wondered how he would greet her if they met, and what her attitude toward him ought to be in view of the break between her father and Isaac Cummings. She found a certain mild excitement as she pondered this, her eyes occasionally turning toward Cummings as he leaned against the railing that enclosed the administrative offices of the company. Grace had always liked and admired him; and it had hurt her more than she ever confessed that after the removal of the Cummingses from the old neighborhood Bob had gradually ceased his attentions. Perhaps his family had interferred as

her mother had hinted; but it made no difference now that he had married and passed completely out of her ken.

Cummings had finished his errand and was walking quickly toward the door when he caught sight of her.

"Hello, Grace! I'm mighty glad to see you," he said cordially. "Why—" He checked himself and the smile left his face abruptly as he remembered that their friendly status had changed since their last meeting.

Grace relieved his embarrassment promptly by smilingly putting out her hand.

"I'm very glad to see you, Bob," she said. "It's really been a long time, almost three years!"

"Just about," he answered slowly.

"Old Father Time has a way of romping right on!" she remarked lightly.

They were in the path of customers intent upon reaching the cages and she took a step toward the door when he said, glancing toward a long bench at the side of the room, "If you're not in a rush let's sit down a minute. There's something I'd like to say to you."

"Oh, very well," she assented, surprised but not displeased.

He was the son of a man who had dismissed her father from the concern in which their names had long been identified; but in so public a place there could be no harm in talking to him. Her old liking for him at once outweighed any feeling she had against his father. He was a big boy when she was still a small girl and he was her first hero. He was always quiet, thoughtful and studious, with a chivalrous regard for the rights and feelings of others. They had been chums, confiding their troubles to each other.

It was to her that he had revealed his succession of boyish ambitions, and she had encouraged his fondness for music when other youngsters twitted him for taking piano lessons like a girl. He had never thought he would like business; he wanted to be a musician, with the leadership of an orchestra as his ultimate goal. It was because his brother Merwin had from an early age shown a refractory spirit that the parental authority had thwarted Bob's aspirations; one of the sons at least had to go into the business and Bob was now a vice-president of the reorganized Cummings Manufacturing Company.

"I've been hoping for a chance to see you, Grace. It's not easy to speak of it but I want you to know I'm sorry things turned out as they did. About your father and the business, I mean. You must all of you feel pretty hard about it. I hope it doesn't mean any change in your plans for finishing at the university. I know how you'd counted on that."

"I've given it up; I'm home to stay," she answered. "But you needn't feel badly about it. Of course it must have been necessary—about father and the business, I mean."

He was embarrassed by her cheerful acceptance of the situation, and stammered, leaving one or two sentences unfinished before he got hold of himself.

"I want you to know I did all I could to prevent the break. It seemed a pity after your father and mine had been together so long. But for some time the plant had needed an active superintendent; just trusting the foremen of the shops wouldn't serve any longer, and you won't mind my saying it but your father never liked executive work. I suggested another way of handling it that would have made Mr. Durland a vice-president and free to go on with his

experiments, but I couldn't put it through. I did my best; honestly I did, Grace!"

There was the old boyish eagerness in this appeal. He regarded her fixedly, anxious for some assurance that she understood. She understood only too well that her father had become an encumbrance, and that in plain terms the company couldn't afford to keep him at his old salary any longer. It was unnecessary for Bob to apologize; but it was like him to seize the first possible moment to express his sympathy. She had always felt the gentleness in him, which was denoted in his blue eyes, which just now shone with the reflection of his eagerness to set himself right with her. He turned his hat continually in his hands—they were finely shaped, with long supple fingers. At the base of his left thumb there was a scar, almost imperceptible, the result of a slash with a jack knife one day in the Durland yard where he had taken her dare to bring down a particular fine spray of blossoms from an old cherry tree. In his anxiety to deliver it unbroken on the bough he had cut himself. She remembered her consternation at seeing the injury, his swaggering attempt to belittle it; his submission to her ministrations as she tied it up with a hankerchief. She was twelve then; he sixteen. He saw the direction of her eyes, lifted the hand and with a smile glanced at the scar. She colored as she realized that he had read her thoughts.

"That was centuries ago," he said. "We did use to have good times in your back yard! Do you remember the day you tumbled out of the swing and broke your arm? You didn't cry; you were a good little sport." And then, his eyes meeting hers, "You're still a mighty good sport!"

"If I never have anything worse than a broken arm to cry over I'll be lucky," she answered evasively.

There was no excuse for lingering; he had expressed his regret at her father's elimination from Cummings-Durland, and it served no purpose to compare memories of the former friendly relation between the young people of the two families, which were now bound to recede to the vanishing point. But he seemed in no haste to leave her. She on her side was finding pleasurable sensations in the encounter. He had been her first sweetheart, so recognized by the other youngsters of the neighborhood, and they had gone to the same dancing class. And he had kissed her once, shyly, on a night when the Cummingses were giving a children's party. This had occurred on a dark corner of the veranda. It had never been repeated or referred to between them, but the memory of it was not without its sweetness. She was ashamed of herself for remembering it now. She wondered whether he too remembered it. And there had been those later attentions after the Cummingses had moved away that had encouraged hopes in her own breast not less than in her mother's that Bob's early preference might survive the shock of the Cummingses' translation to the fashionable district, with its inevitable change of social orientation.

Ethel and her mother had questioned the happiness of his marriage, and her mind played upon this as she sat beside him, feeling the charm he had always had for her and wondering a little about the girl he had married whom she had never seen and knew of only from the talk at home. But two years was not long enough; it was ridiculous to assume that he wasn't happy with his wife.

"We certainly had a lot of fun over there," he was saying. "I suppose the park fountain plays just the same and the kids still sail their boats in the pond."

"Yes, and go wading and fall in and have to be fished

out by the policeman! But we can't be kids always, Bob!"

"No; that's the worst of it!" he said with a tinge of dejection.

"I'm all grown up now and have a job. I'm a working girl!"

"No!" he exclaimed incredulously. "And Roy——"

"Oh, Roy's to finish his law course; he'll be through in June."

"That's too bad, Grace!" he exclaimed. "It's you who ought to have stayed on! You're the very type of girl who ought to go to college. It would have made all the difference in the world to you! And Ethel—is she at work too?"

"Yes; she's in an insurance office and I'm in Shipley's!" she went on smiling to relieve his evident discomfiture. "I'm in the ready-to-wear and I'll appreciate any customers you send my way. Call for Number Eighteen!"

"Why, Grace! You don't mean it! You have no business doing a thing like that. You could do a lot better."

"Well, I didn't just see it. I'm an unskilled laborer and haven't time to fit myself for teaching, stenography or anything like that. You get results quicker in a place like Shipley's. That is, I hope to get them if I'm as intelligent as I think I am!"

"I'm terribly sorry, Grace. I feel— I feel— as though we were responsible, father and I; and we are, of course. There ought to have been some other way for you; something more——"

"Please don't! That's the way mother and Ethel talk."

She rose quickly, feeling that nothing was to be gained by continuing the discussion of matters that

were irrevocably settled. And, moreover, his distress was so manifest in his face that she feared the scrutiny of passersby.

"Good-bye, Bob," she said. "I'm awfully glad I met you. Please don't trouble at all about what can't be helped. I haven't any hard feeling—not the slightest."

"I don't like it at all," he said impatiently.

He kept beside her to the entrance, where she gave him a nod and smile and hurried away. She was troubled at once for fear she hadn't expressed cordially enough her appreciation of his sympathy. Very likely they would never meet again; there was no reason why they should. He had merely done what was perfectly natural in view of their old friendship, made it clear that he was sorry her father had been thrust out of the company of which he had been one of the founders. She was unable to see anything in the interview beyond a wish on his part to be kind, to set himself right. And it was like Bob to do that.

IV

The strong romantic strain in her was quickened by the meeting. All afternoon her thoughts played about Bob Cummings. She reviewed their associations in childhood on through those last attentions after the Cummingses left the Military Park neighborhood. Her mother had probably been right in saying that if fortune hadn't borne the Cummingses steadily upward, leaving the Durlands behind, Bob might have married her. It had been a mistake for him to marry a society girl who was, she surmised, incapable of appreciating his temperament. A matter of propinquity very likely; she had heard that the girl was not rich but

belonged to one of the old families; and very likely on her side it had been an advantageous arrangement.

Why did men marry the wrong women? she asked herself with proneness of youth to propound and answer unanswerable questions. There was Trenton, who had so frankly admitted the failure of his own marriage and with equal frankness took the burden of his failure upon himself. No two men could be more utterly unlike than Ward Trenton and Bob Cummings, and she busied herself contrasting them. Trenton was practical-minded; Bob a dreamer, and save for his college experiences the range of his life had been narrow. If both were free which would she choose? So great was her preoccupation with these speculations that her work suffered; through sheer inattention she let a promising customer escape without making a purchase.

In the afternoon distribution of mail she received a letter from Trenton. It began, "Dear Grace" and read:

"I expected to see you again this week—that is, of course, if you'd be willing; but I'm called to Kansas City unexpectedly and may not touch your port for ten days or so. I'm not conceited enough to assume that you will be grief-stricken over my delay, and strictly speaking there's no excuse for writing except that you've rather haunted me,—a welcome ghost, I assure you! I talked far too much about myself the other night. One matter I shouldn't have spoken of at all. No question of confidence in you or anything of that sort. But it's something I never discuss even with old and intimate friends. You have guessed what I mean. Bad taste, you probably thought it. It was quite that! I want you to think as well of me as you can. I'm counting very much on seeing you again.

I hope you are well and happy and that nothing has happened to your eyes since I saw them last!"

This was all except that he named a Kansas City club where he could be reached for the next week if she felt moved to write. She hadn't expected to hear from him and the note was a distinct surprise. At every opportunity she reread it, and, catching her in the act, Irene teased her about it.

"Oh, you've started something! I'll wager he signed his name in full; that's just like him. Tommy never writes to me and when he wires he signs an assumed name. But Ward Trenton's different. I think if he decided to commit murder he'd send his own account of it to the papers. He didn't talk to you about his wife, I suppose, when Tommy and I left you alone so long at The Shack? Tommy's known him for years but he says he wouldn't think of mentioning his wife to him. I'd like to see Ward in love! These quiet ones go strong when they get started."

"Oh, his letter's just a little friendly jolly. He's had to go to Kansas City instead of coming back here right away."

"Of course he just had to explain that!" Irene laughed. "I can see this is going to be a real case. See what you can do with that woman just coming in. She looks as though she might really have some of the mazuma."

It was not so easy as Grace had imagined in her spiritual ardor of Sunday to begin retreating from Irene. She realized that Irene would hardly listen in an amiable spirit to the warning she had thought in her hours of contrition it was her duty to give her friend. Irene's serenity as she paced the aisles of the department, her friendliness and unfailing good humor were all disarming. Irene wasn't so bad perhaps; Grace

was much more tolerant of Irene than she had thought on Sunday would ever be possible again.

The letter from Ward Trenton had the effect of reopening a door which Grace had believed closed and the key thrown away. She found herself wondering whether he might not always write to girls he met and liked; and yet as his image appeared before her—and he lived vividly in her thoughts—she accepted as sincere his statement that he had broken an established reserve in talking of his wife. This of course was what he referred to; and she saw a fine nobility in his apprehension lest the recipient of his confidences might think the less of him for mentioning his wife at all.

Grace was again tormented by curiosity as to whether Trenton still loved his wife and the hope that he did not. She hated herself for this; hated herself for having lost her grip upon the good resolutions of Sunday to forget the whole episode of Kemp's party. She knew enough of the mind's processes to indulge in what she fancied was a rigid self-analysis. She wondered whether she was really a normal being, whether other girls' thoughts ran riot about men as hers did; whether there might not be something vulgar and base in her nature that caused her within a few hours to tolerate the thought of two men, both married, as potential lovers. . . .

It occurred to her that she might too effectually have burned her bridges when she left the university. There were young men she had known during her two years in Bloomington whose interest she might have kept alive; among them there were a number of sons of well-to-do families in country towns. But she was unable to visualize herself married and settled in a

small town with her prospect of seeing and knowing the world limited by a husband's means or ambition. There were one or two young professors who had paid her attentions. One of them, a widower and a man of substantial attainments, had asked her to marry him, but she was unable to see herself a professor's wife, beset by all the uncertainties of the teaching profession.

She had always been used to admiration, but until now she had heavily discounted all the compliments that were paid her good looks. She found herself covertly looking into the mirrors as she passed. Trenton had been all over the world and no doubt had seen many beautiful women; and yet he wrote that she haunted him, which could only mean that he was unable to escape from the thought of her. Again, deeply humble, she scouted the idea that he could have fallen in love with her; he was only a little sorry for her, thinking of her probably as a rather nice girl who was to be pitied because she had to work for her living.

He had spoken of being lonely. Maybe it was only for lack of anything better to do that he fell to thinking of her as he sat in the club in St. Louis and wrote to her out of his craving for sympathy. At twenty-one Grace did not know that the only being in the world who is more dangerous than a lonely woman is a lonely man.

V

Grace was correct in her assumption that Ward Trenton had written her in a fit of loneliness but she

did not know that in the same hour he had written also to his wife. After a few sentences explaining his presence in St. Louis, the letter to Mrs. Trenton ran:

"It's almost ridiculous,—the distinctly separate lives we lead. I was just studying the calendar and find that we haven't met for exactly six months. When I'm at home—if I may so refer to the house in Pittsburgh that fixes my voting place and—pardon me!—doesn't fix much of anything else—I occasionally find traces of your visits. I must say the servants do pretty well considering that they go their own gait. You're a wonderful housekeeper at long range! But I'm not kicking. The gods must have their will with us.

"I read of you in the newspapers frequently and judge that you're living the life that suits you best. I found a copy of your "Clues to a New Social Order" on the new book table here in the club library and reread parts of it. It never ceases to tickle me that a woman of your upbringing, with your line of blue-nosed New England ancestors, should want to pull down the pillars of society. I marvel at you! . . .

"You've asked me now and then not to be afraid to tell you if ever I ran into a woman who interested me particularly. I haven't had anything to report till now. But the other night I met a girl,—she's probably just crossing the line into the twenties,—an interesting, provocative young person. She represents in a mild degree the new order of things you're so mad about; going to live her own life; marriage not in the sketch. She's a salesgirl in a big shop, but her people have known better days and she went halfway through college. She's standing with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet, but I'm afraid

won't be satisfied to play in the brook; she's keen for the deeper waters. She's as handsome as a goddess. She kissed me very prettily—her own idea I assure you! The remembrance of this incident is not wholly displeasing to me; it was quite spontaneous; filial perhaps. . . .

"Those bonds you have in the Ashawana Water Power Company are all right. I had a look at the plant recently and the dividends are sure. . . ."

Having sealed and addressed the envelopes Trenton laid them side by side on the blotter before him, lighted a cigarette, and then drew out and opened the locket that Grace had noted at The Shack, studying the woman's face within a little wistfully. Then with a sigh he thrust it into his pocket and went out into the night and tramped the streets, coming at last to the post office where he mailed both letters.

VI

Grace set off with the liveliest expectations to keep her appointment with Miss Reynolds. The house struck her at once as a true expression of the taste and characteristics of its owner. It was severely simple in design and furnishing, but with adequate provision for comfort. Grace had seen pictures of such rooms in magazines and knew that they represented the newest ideas in house decoration. The neutral tint of the walls was an ease to eye and spirit. Ethel had spoken of Miss Reynolds as quaint, an absurd term to apply either to the little woman or any of her belongings. She was very much up to date, even a little ahead of the procession, it seemed to Grace.

"Oh, thank you! I'm glad if it seems nice," Miss Reynolds replied when Grace praised the house. "All my life I've lived in houses where everything was old and the furniture so heavy you had to get a derrick to move it on cleaning day. But I can't accept praise for anything here. The house was built for a family that moved away from town without occupying it. The young architect who designed it had ideas about how it ought to be fixed up and I turned him loose. There was a music room, so I had to get a grand piano to fit into the alcove made for it. That young man is most advanced and I thought at first he wouldn't let me have any place to sit down but you see he did allow me a few chairs! Are you freezing? I hate an overheated house."

"I'm perfectly comfortable," said Grace, noting that Miss Reynolds wore the skirt of the blue suit she had sold her, with a plain white waist and a loose collar. Her snow white hair was brushed back loosely from her forehead. Her head was finely modeled and her face, aglow from an afternoon tramp in the November air, still preserved the roundness of youth. The wrinkles perceptible about her eyes and mouth seemed out of place,—only tentative tracings, not the indelible markings of age. She had an odd little way of turning her head to one side when listening, and mistaking this for a sign of deafness Grace had lifted her voice slightly.

"Now, my dear child!" cried Miss Reynolds, "just because I cock my head like a robin don't think I'm shy of hearing. It always amuses me to have people take it for granted that I can't hear. I hear everything; I sometimes wish I didn't hear so much! I've always had that trick. It's because one of my eyes is a bit stronger than the other. You'll find that I

don't do it when I wear my glasses, but I usually take them off in the house."

At the table Miss Reynolds rambled on as though Grace were an old friend.

"Our old house down on Meridian Street was sold while I was abroad. It had grown to be a dingy hole. Garret full of trunks of letters and rubbish like that. I cabled at once to sell or destroy everything in the place. So that's why I'm able to have a new deal. Are you crazy about old furniture? Please tell me you are not?

"Oh, I like new things ever so much better!" Grace assured her.

"I thought you would. I despise old furniture. Old stuff of every kind. Old people too!" With a smile on her lips she watched Grace to note the effect of this speech. "I shouldn't have dreamed of asking you to give up an evening for me if I meant to talk to you like an old woman. My neighbors are mostly young married people, but they don't seem to mind my settling among them. I'm sixty-two; hurry and say I don't look a day over fifty!"

"Forty!" Grace corrected.

"I knew I was going to like you! I think I'll spend my remaining years here if I can keep away from people who want to talk about old times, meaning of course when I was a girl. It doesn't thrill me at all to know that right here where this house stands my grandfather owned a farm. Every time I go down town I dodge old citizens I've known all my life for fear they'll tell me about the great changes and expect me to get tearful about it. I can't mourn over the passing of old landmarks and I'd certainly not weep at the removal of some of the old fossils around this town who count all their money every day to

make sure nobody's got a nickel away from them. They keep their lawyers busy tightening up their wills. They've invented ways of tying up property in trusts so you can almost take it with you!"

"That's their way of enjoying life, I suppose," remarked Grace, who was taking advantage of Miss Reynolds' talkativeness to do full justice to a substantial dinner. The filet of beef and the fresh mushrooms testified to the presence of an artist in the kitchen, and the hot rolls were of superlative lightness. Miss Reynolds paused occasionally to urge Grace to a second helping of everything offered.

"I detest anemic people," Miss Reynolds declared. "If you don't eat my food I'll feel terribly guilty at asking you here."

"It's the best food I ever ate! We were going to have corned beef and cabbage at home, so all these wonderful dishes seem heavenly!"

"You've probably wondered why I grabbed you as I did and asked you to sit at meat with me?"

"Why, I hope you asked me because you liked me!" Grace answered.

"That's the correct answer, Grace—may I call you Grace? I hate having a lot of people around; I like to concentrate on one person, and when I met you in the church entry it just popped into my head that you wouldn't mind a bit giving me an evening. It's awfully tiresome going to dinners where the people are all my own age. I've always hated formal entertaining. You struck me as a very fair representative of the new generation that appeals to me so much. Don't look so startled; I mean that, my dear, as a compliment! And of course I really don't know a thing about you except that you have very pretty manners and didn't get vexed that day in the store

when I must have frightened you out of your wits."

"But you didn't," Grace protested. "I liked your way of saying exactly what you wanted."

"I always try to do that; it saves a lot of bother. And please don't be offended if I say that it's a joy to see you sitting right there looking so charming. You have charming ways; of course you know that. And the effect is much enhanced when you blush that way!"

Grace was very charming indeed as she smiled at her singular hostess, who had a distinct charm of her own. She felt that she could say anything to Miss Reynolds and with girlish enthusiasm she promptly told her that she was adorable.

"I've been called a crank by experts," Miss Reynolds said challengingly, as though she were daring her guest to refute the statement. "I get along better with foreigners than with my own people. Over there they attribute my indiosyncrasies to American crudeness, to be tolerated only because they think me much better off in worldly goods than I really am."

They remained at the table for coffee, and the waitress who had served the dinner offered cigarettes. Grace shook her head and experienced a mild shock when Miss Reynolds took a cigarette and lighted it with the greatest unconcern.

"Abominable habit! Got in the way of it while I was abroad. Please don't let me corrupt you!"

"I suppose I'll learn in time," Grace replied, amused as she remembered the stress her mother and Ethel had laid on Miss Reynolds' conservatism.

It occurred to her that Miss Reynolds was entitled to know something of her history and she recited the facts of her life simply and straightforwardly. She had only said that her father had been unfortunate

without explaining his connection with Cummings-Durland. Miss Reynolds smoked and sipped her coffee in silence; then asked in her quick fashion:

"Cummings-Durland? Those names tinkle together away back in my memory."

"Father and Mr. Cummings came here from Rangerton and began business together. The Cummingses used to live neighbors to us over by Military Park."

"Bob Cummings is one of my neighbors," said Miss Reynolds. "Rather tragic—putting that young man into business. He hates it. There ought to be some way of protecting artistic young men from fathers who try to fit square pegs into round holes. I suppose the business troubles broke up the friendship of your families."

"Yes; my mother and sister are very bitter about it; they think father was unfairly treated. But I met Bob only this morning and he was very friendly. He seemed terribly cut up because I'd left college."

"He's a sensitive fellow; he would feel it," said Miss Reynolds. "So you children grew up together—the Durlands and the Cummings. I'm asking about your present relations because Bob comes in occasionally to play my piano—when there's something on at his own house that he doesn't like. His wife's the sort that just can't be quiet; must have people around. She's crazy about bridge and he isn't! He called me on the telephone just before you came to ask if he might come over after dinner, as his wife's having people in for bridge. I told him to come along. I enjoy his playing; he really plays very well indeed. You don't mind?"

"Not at all," said Grace, wondering at the fate that was throwing her in Bob Cummings' way twice in one

day and a day in which she had been torn with so many conflicting emotions.

"If you have the slightest feeling about meeting him do say so; you may always be perfectly frank with me."

"Yes; thank you, Miss Reynolds. But I'd love to hear Bob play."

When they were again in the living room Grace stood for a moment scanning a table covered with periodicals and new books.

"Since I came home I've been trying to find out what's going on in America, so I read everything," Miss Reynolds explained. "The general opinion seems to be that things are going to pot. Right under your hand there's a book called 'Clues to a New Social Order,' written by a woman named Trenton. I understand she's a respectable person and not a short-haired lunatic; but she throws everything overboard!"

"I've read it," said Grace. "It's certainly revolutionary."

"All of that!" Miss Reynolds retorted. "But it does make you think! Everybody's restless and crazy for excitement. My young married neighbors all belong to families I know or know about; live in very charming houses and have money to spend—too much most of them—and they don't seem able to stand an evening at home by themselves. But maybe the new way's better. Maybe their chances of happiness are greater where they mix around more. I'm curious about the whole business. These young folks don't go to church. Why don't they, when their fathers and grandfathers always did? Their parents stayed at home in the evening. My father used to grumble horribly when my mother tried to get him into a dress

suit. But there was wickedness then too, only people just whispered about it and tried to keep it from the young folks. There were men right here in this town who sat up very proper in the churches on Sunday who didn't hesitate to break all the commandments during the week. But now you might think people were sending up fireworks to call attention to their sins! I remember the first time I went to a dinner—that was thirty years ago—where cocktails were passed around. It seemed awful—the very end of the world. When I told my mother about it she was horrified; said what she thought of the hostess who had exposed her daughter to temptation! But now prohibition's driven everybody to drink. I asked my chauffeur yesterday how long it would take him to get me a quart of whiskey and he said about half an hour if I'd let him use the car. I told him to go ahead and sure enough he was back with it in twenty minutes. It was pretty fair whiskey, too," Miss Reynolds concluded. "I was curious to see just how it felt to break the law and I confess to you, my dear, that I experienced a feeling of exultation!"

She reached for a fresh cigarette and lighted it tranquilly.

"Everybody's down on the young people," said Grace, confident that she had a sympathetic listener. "They tell us all the time that we're of no account."

"There are pages of that on that table," Miss Reynolds replied. "Well, I'm for the young people; particularly you girls who have to rustle for yourselves. If I stood up in a store all day or hammered a typewriter I'm sure I'd feel that I was entitled to some pleasure when I got through. Just what do girls do—I don't mean girls of your upbringing exactly and your

schooling,—but less lucky girls who manage their own affairs and are not responsible to any one."

"I haven't been at work long enough to know much about that," said Grace; "but—nearly every girl who's at all attractive has a beau!"

"Certainly!" Miss Reynolds affirmed promptly. "It's always been so. There's nothing new in that."

"And they go to dances. Every girl likes to dance. And sometimes they're taken out to dinner or to a show if the young man can afford it. Girls don't have parties at home very much; I mean even where they live at home. There's not room to dance usually; the houses are too small and it isn't much fun. And if the beau has a car he takes the girl driving."

"And these girls marry and have homes of their own? That still happens, doesn't it?"

"Well, a good many girls don't want to marry,—not the young men they're likely to meet. Or if they do, some of them keep on working. There are girls in Shipley's who are married and keep their jobs. They like the additional money; they can wear better clothes, and they like to keep their independence."

"There you are!" Miss Reynolds exclaimed. "The old stuff about woman's place being in the home isn't the final answer any more. If you won't think it impertinent just how do you feel on that point, Grace?"

"Oh, I shouldn't want to marry for a long, long time!—even if I had the chance," Grace answered with the candor Miss Reynolds invited. "I've got that idea about freedom and independence myself! I hope I'm not shocking you!"

"Quite the contrary. I had chances to marry myself," Miss Reynolds confessed. "I almost did marry when I was twenty-two but decided I didn't love the young man enough. I had these ideas of freedom

too, you see. I haven't really been very sorry; I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself. But the man I almost married died miserably, an awful failure. I have nothing to regret. How about college girls—you must know a good many?"

"Oh, a good many co-eds marry as soon as they graduate, and settle down. But those I've known are mostly country town girls. I think it's different with city girls who have to go to work. They're not so anxious to get married."

"The fact seems to be that marriage isn't just the chief goal of a woman's life any more. Things have reached such a pass that it's really respectable to be a spinster like me! But we all like to be loved—we women, don't we? And it's woman's blessing and her curse that she has love to give!"

She was silent a moment, then bent forward and touched Grace's hand. There was a mist of dreams in the girl's lovely eyes.

"I wish every happiness for you, dear. I hope with all my heart that love will come to you in a great way, which is the only way that counts!"

VII

A moment later Bob Cummings appeared and greeted Grace with unfeigned surprise and pleasure.

"I'll say we don't need to be introduced! Grace and I are old friends," he said, still unable to conceal his mystification at finding Grace established on terms of intimacy in his neighbor's house.

"I inveigled Grace here without telling her it was to be a musical evening," said Miss Reynolds.

"Oh, I'd have come just the same!" laughed Grace.

"We'll cut the music now," said Cummings. "It

will be a lot more fun to talk. I tell you, Grace, it's a joy to have a place of refuge like this! Miss Reynolds is the kindest woman in the world. I've adopted her as my aunt."

He bowed to Miss Reynolds, and glanced from one to the other with boyish eagerness for their approval.

"That's the first I've heard of it," Miss Reynolds retorted with a grieved air. "Why don't you tell him, Grace, that being an aunt sounds too old. You might both adopt me as a cousin!"

Grace and Bob discussed the matter with mock gravity and decided that there was no good reason why they shouldn't be her cousin.

"Then you must call me Cousin Beulah!" said Miss Reynolds. Her nephews and nieces were widely scattered she said, and she didn't care for her lawful cousins.

Grace talked much more freely under the stimulus of Bob's presence. It appeared that Miss Reynolds had not known Bob until she moved into the neighborhood and their acquaintance had begun quite romantically. Miss Reynolds had stopped him as he was passing her house shortly after she moved in and asked him whether he knew anything about trees. Some of the trees on her premises were preyed upon by malevolent insects and quite characteristically she had halted him to ask whether he could recommend a good tree doctor.

"You looked intelligent; so I took a chance," Miss Reynolds explained. "And the man you recommended didn't hurt the trees much—only two died. I've bought a tree book and hereafter I'll do my own spraying."

When Miss Reynolds spoke of Mrs. Cummings she referred to her as Evelyn, explaining to Grace that

she was the daughter of an old friend. Evelyn, it appeared, was arranging a Thanksgiving party for one of the country clubs. Bob said she was giving a lot of time to it; it was going to be a brilliant affair. Then finding that Grace did not know Evelyn and remembering that in all likelihood her guest wouldn't be invited to the entertainment, Miss Reynolds turned the talk into other channels. It was evident that Bob was a welcome visitor to Miss Reynolds's house and that she understood and humored him and indulged and encouraged his chaffing attitude toward her. That he should make a practice of escaping from a company at home that did not interest him was just like Bob! He was lucky to have a neighbor so understanding and amiable as Miss Reynolds. Perhaps again and often she would meet Bob at Miss Reynolds's when he found Evelyn irksome. Grace rose and changed her seat, as though by so doing she were escaping from an idea she felt to be base, an affront to Miss Reynolds, an insult to Bob.

"The piano's waiting, Bob"; and Miss Reynolds led the way to the music room across the hall.

Bob began, as had always been his way, Grace remembered, by improvising, weaving together snatches of classical compositions, with whimsical variations. Then, after a pause, he sat erect, struck into Schumann's Nachtstuck, and followed it with Handel's Largo and Rubenstein's Melody in F, all associated in her memory with the days of their boy-and-girl companionship. He shook his head impatiently, waited a moment and then a new mood laying hold of him he had recourse to Chopin, and played a succession of pieces that filled the room with color and light. Grace watched the sure touch of his hands, marveling that he had been so faithful to the music that was his passion

as a boy. It had always been his solace in the unhappy hours to which he had been a prey as far back as she could remember. There was no questioning his joy in the great harmonies. He was endowed with a talent that had been cultivated with devotion, and he might have had a brilliant career if fate had not swept him into a business for which his temperament wholly unfitted him.

While he was still playing Miss Reynolds was called away by callers and left the room quietly.

"You and Bob stay here," she whispered to Grace. "These are people I have to see."

When Bob ended with a Chopin valse, graceful and capricious, that seemed to Grace to bring the joy of spring into the room, he swung round, noted Miss Reynolds's absence and then the closed door.

"My audience reduced one-half!" he exclaimed ruefully. "At this rate I'll soon be alone."

"Don't stop! Those last things were marvelous!"

"Just one more! Do you remember how I cornered you one day in our old house—you were still wearing pigtails—and told you I'd learned a new piece and you sat like a dear angel while I played this—my first show piece?"

It was Mendelssohn's Spring Song, and she thrilled to think that he hadn't forgotten. The familiar chords brought back vividly the old times; he had been so proud and happy that day in displaying his prowess.

Her praise was sweet to him then, and she saw that it was grateful to him now.

"You play wonderfully, Bob; it's a pity you couldn't have kept on!"

"We can't do as we please in this world," he said, throwing himself into a chair and reaching for the cigarettes. "But I get a lot of fun out of my music.

"I'm not sorry I stuck to it as I did from the time I could stretch an octave. Are you spending the night with Miss Reynolds?"

"No; we're not quite that chummy. Miss Reynolds said she'd send me home."

"Not on your life she won't! I'm going to run you out in my roadster. That's settled. I don't have to show up at home till midnight, so there's plenty of time. You and Cousin Beulah seem to get on famously."

Grace gave a vivacious account of the beginning of her acquaintance with Miss Reynolds, not omitting the ten dollar tip.

He laughed; then frowned darkly.

"I've been troubled about this thing ever since I met you today," he said doggedly; "your having to quit college, I mean. I feel guilty, terribly guilty."

"Please, Bob! don't spoil my nice evening by mentioning those things again. I know it wasn't your fault. So let's go on being friends just as though nothing had happened."

"Of course. But it's rotten just the same. You can hardly see me without——"

She raised her hand warningly.

"Bob, I'd be ashamed if anything could spoil our friendship. I'm perfectly satisfied that you had nothing to do with father's troubles. So please forget it."

She won him back to good nature—she had always been able to do that—and they talked of old times, of the companions of their youth in the park neighborhood. This was safe ground. The fact that they were harking back to their childhood and youth emphasized the changed circumstances of both the Durlands and the Cummingses. It didn't seem possible that he was married; it struck her suddenly that he didn't appear

at all married; and with this came the reflection that he was the kind of man who should never marry. He should have kept himself free; he had too much temperament for a harmonious married life.

"You don't know Evelyn," he remarked a little absently. And then as though Grace's not knowing Evelyn called for an explanation he added: "She was away at school for a long time."

"What's she like, Bob?" Grace asked. "A man ought to be able to draw a wonderful picture of his wife."

"He should indeed! Let me see. She's fair; blue eyes; tall, slender; likes to have something doing; wins golf cups; a splendid dancer. . . . Oh, pshaw! You wouldn't get any idea from that!" he said with an uneasy laugh. "She's very popular; people like her tremendously."

"I'm sure she's lovely, Bob. Is she musical?"

"Oh, she doesn't care much for music; my practicing bores her. She used to sing a little but she's given it up."

He hadn't said that he hoped she might meet Evelyn; and for a moment Grace resented this. She was a saleswoman in a department store and Evelyn had no time for an old friend of her husband who sold ready-to-wear clothing. A snob, no doubt, self-centered and selfish; Bob's failure to suggest a meeting with his wife made it clear that he realized the futility of trying to bring them together.

"You haven't missed me a bit!" cried Miss Reynolds appearing suddenly. "Is the music all over?"

"Oh, we've been reminiscing," said Grace. "And you missed the best of Bob's playing."

"I'm sorry those people chose tonight for their call. It was Judge Sanders, my lawyer, and his wife, old

friends—but I didn't dare smoke before *them!* You've got to stay now while I have a cigarette."

When Grace said presently that she must go and Miss Reynolds reached for the bell to ring for her car, Bob stayed her hand.

"That's all fixed! I'll run around and bring my car and *I'll* take Grace home. Please say you don't mind!"

"Of course, I don't mind; but you needn't think you're establishing a precedent. The next time Grace comes I'll lock the door against you and all the rest of the world!"

While Bob went for his car Miss Reynolds warned Grace that she was likely to ask her to the house again.

"You'll be doing me a favor by coming, dear. And remember, if there's ever anything I can do for you you're to tell me. That's a promise. I should be sorry if you didn't feel that you could come to me with *anything.*"

VIII

"It's only a little after ten," said Bob as he started the car, "and I'm going to touch the edge of the country before I take you home. Is that all right? How long's it been since we went driving together?"

"Centuries! It was just after you moved."

"I was afraid you'd forgotten. I remember the evening perfectly. We stopped at the Country Club to dance and just played around by ourselves. But we did have a good time!"

His spirits were soaring; through his talk ran an undercurrent of mischievous delight in his freedom. "It's just bully to see you again!" he repeated several times. "While I was playing I kept thinking of the

royal fun we used to have. Do you remember that day our families had a picnic—we were just kids then—and you and I wandered away and got lost looking for wild flowers or whatever the excuse was; and a big storm came up and our mothers gave us a good raking when we came back all soaked and everybody was scared for fear we'd tumbled into the river!"

To Grace the remembrance of this adventure was not nearly so thrilling as the fact that Bob, now married, still chortled over the recollection and was obviously delighted to be spending an evening with her while his wife enjoyed herself in her own fashion at home. He would probably not tell Evelyn that he had taken the daughter of his father's old business associate driving, a girl who clerked in a department store and was clearly out of his social orbit. Here was another episode which Grace knew she dared not mention at home; Ethel and her mother would be horrified. But Grace was happy in the thought that Bob Cummings still found pleasure in her company even if she was Number Eighteen at Shipley's and took and accepted tips from kindly-disposed customers. He halted the car at a point which afforded a broad sweep of moonlit field and woodland.

"You know, Grace, sometimes I've been hungry and positively homesick for a talk with you such as we've had tonight."

"Please drive on! You mustn't say things like that."

"Well, that's the way I feel anyhow. It's queer how I haven't been able to do anything I wanted to with my life. I'm like a man who's been pushed on a train he didn't want to take and can't get off."

Here again was his old eager appeal for sympathy. He was weak, she knew, with the weakness that is a

defect of such natures. It would be perfectly easy to begin a flirtation with him, possibly to see him frequently in some such way as she saw him now. It was wrong to encourage him, but her curiosity as to how far he would go overcame her scruples; it would do no harm to lead him on a little.

"You ought to be very happy, Bob. You have everything to make you happy!"

"I've made mistakes all down the line," he answered with a flare of defiance. "I ought to have stood out against father when he put me into the business. I'm no good at it. But Merwin made a mess of things; father's got him on a ranch out in Montana now, and Tom's got the bug to be a doctor and nothing can shake him. So I have to sit at a desk every day doing things I hate and doing them badly of course. And for the rest of it——!"

He stopped short of the rest of it, which Grace surmised was his marriage to Evelyn. It was his own fault that he had failed to control and manage his life. He might have resisted his father when it came to going into business and certainly it spoke for a feeble will if he had married to gratify his mother's social ambitions. She was about to bid him drive on when he turned toward her saying:

"I feel nearer to you, Grace, than to anybody else in the world! It was always that way. It's got hold of me again tonight—that feeling I used to have that no matter what happened you'd know, you'd understand!"

"Those days are gone, Bob," she said, allowing a vague wistfulness to creep into her tone. "I mustn't see you any more. We've both got our lives to live. You know that as well as I do. You're just a little down tonight; you always had moods like this when

you thought the world was against you. It's just a mood and everything will look differently tomorrow."

"But I've got to see you, Grace; not often maybe, but now and then. There'll be some way of managing."

"No!" she exclaimed, her curiosity fully satisfied as to how far he would go. "I'll be angry with you in a minute! This is positively the last time!"

"Please don't say that!" he pleaded. "I wouldn't offend you for anything in the world, Grace."

"I know you wouldn't, Bob," she said kindly. "But there are some things that won't do, you know."

"Yes, I know," he conceded with the petulance of a child reluctantly admitting a fault.

"I'm glad you still like me, but you know perfectly well this kind of thing's all wrong. I mustn't see you again."

"But Grace, what if I just have to see you!"

"Oh, don't be so silly! You'll never just have to. You've got a wife to tell your troubles to."

She wasn't sure that she wanted to make it impossible for him to see her again or that she really preferred that he tell his troubles to his wife. His troubles were always largely imaginary, due to his sensitive and impressionable nature.

"You needn't remind me of that!" he said.

"Oh, start the car! Let's all be cheerful! We might as well laugh as cry in this world. Did you see the game Saturday? I had a suitor turn up from the university and we had a jolly time."

"Who was he?" Bob demanded savagely.

"Oh, Bob, you're a perfect scream! Well, you needn't be jealous of *him*."

"I'm jealous of every man you know!" he said.

"Now, you're talking like a crazy man! Suppose

I were to tell you I'm jealous of Evelyn! Please remember that you forgot all about me and married another girl quite cheerfully with a church wedding and flowers and everything. You needn't come to me now for consolation!"

She refused to hear his defense from this charge, and mocked him by singing snatches of college songs till they were in town. When they reached the Durland house she told him not to get out.

"I won't tell the family you brought me home; they wouldn't understand. Thanks ever so much, Bob."

Mrs. Durland and Ethel were waiting to hear of her evening with Miss Reynolds and she told everything except that she had met Cummings there. She satisfied as quickly as possible their curiosity as to Miss Reynolds and her establishment, and hurried to her room eager to be alone. She assured herself that she could never love Bob Cummings, would never have loved him even if their families had remained neighbors and it had been possible to marry him. He wasn't her type—the phrase pleased her—and in trying to determine just what type of man most appealed to her Trenton loomed large in her speculations. Within a few weeks she had encountered two concrete instances of the instability of marriage. Love, it seemed, was a fleeting thing and loyalty had become a by-word. Bob was only a spoiled boy, shallow, easily influenced, yet withal endowed with graces and charms. But graces and charms were not enough. She brought herself to the point of feeling sorry for Evelyn, who probably refused to humor and pet Bob and was doubtless grateful that he had music as an outlet for his emotions. It was something, though, to have found that he hadn't forgotten; that there were times when

he felt the need of her. She wondered whether he would take her word as final and make no further attempt to see her.

IX

Grace addressed herself sincerely to the business of bringing all the cheer possible to the home circle. She overcame her annoyance at being obliged to recount the details of her work, realizing that her mother spent her days at home and save for the small affairs of her club had little touch with the world beyond her dooryard. Ethel's days in the insurance office were much alike and she lacked Grace's gift for making a good story out of a trifling incident. Even Mr. Durland enjoyed Grace's account of the whims and foibles of the women she encountered at Shipley's. Grace reasoned that so long as she lived at home it would be a mistake not to make the best of things; but even in her fits of repentance she had not regretted her assertion of the right to go and come unquestioned.

In the week following she left the house on two evenings saying merely that she was going out. On one of these occasions she returned a book to the public library; on another she walked aimlessly for an hour. These unexplained absences were to determine whether her new won liberty was really firmly established. Nothing was said either by her mother or Ethel, though it was clear that they were mystified by her early return, though not to the point of asking where she had been. On a third evening she announced at the table that she had earned a good bonus that day and would celebrate by taking them all to the vaudeville. Mrs. Durland and Ethel gave plausi-

ble excuses for declining, but not without expressing their appreciation of the invitation in kind terms, and Grace and her father set off alone.

In her cogitations Grace was convinced that nothing short of a miracle could ever improve materially the family fortunes. They had the house free of encumbrance, but it needed re-roofing, and the furnishings were old and dingy. Mrs. Durland had worked out a budget by which to manage the family finances, and it was clear enough to Grace that what she and Ethel earned would just about take care of the necessary running expenses. Mrs. Durland had received for many years an income of five hundred dollars a year from her father's estate, and this Grace learned had always been spent on the family. The last payment had been put away, Mrs. Durland explained to her daughters, to help establish Roy after he completed his law course. It was impressed upon Grace constantly that all the hopes of bettering the family conditions centered in Roy. Ethel shared, though in less degree, her monther's confidence in the son of the house. Grace kept silent when Roy's prospects were discussed, feeling that it would serve no purpose to express her feeling that Roy had no special talent for the law, and even if he had the Durlands were without family or business connections that could possibly assist him in establishing himself.

X

Grace's meeting with Bob Cummings served to sharpen her sense of social differentiations. Her mother had always encouraged the idea that the Durlands were a family of dignity, entitled to the highest consideration; but stranded as they were in a neigh-

borhood that had no lines of communication with polite society, Mrs. Durland now rarely received an invitation even to the houses of her old friends. Grace's excursions in social science had made her aware of the existence of such a thing as class consciousness; but she had never questioned that she belonged to the favored element. The thought assailed her now that as a wage-earning girl she had a fixed social status from which there was little likelihood she would ever escape. The daughters of prominent families she waited on at Shipley's were no better looking, no more intelligent and had no better social instincts than she possessed; but she was as completely shut off from any contact with them as though she were the child of a Congo chieftain. With all her romanticism she failed to picture the son of one of the first families making her acquaintance and introducing her to his family as the girl he meant to marry. Several young men with whom she became acquainted in Shipley's had asked her to go to dances, or for Sunday drives. Irene sniffed when Grace reported these overtures.

"Oh, they're nice fellows; but what have they got to offer? They're never going to get anywhere. You can't afford to waste your time on them."

However, Grace accepted one of these invitations. The young man took her to a public dance hall where the music was good, but the patrons struck her as altogether uninspiring; and she resented being inspected by a police matron. She danced with her escort all evening, and then they went to a cafeteria for sandwiches and soda water.

Irene had warned Grace that such young fellows were likely to prove fresh; that they always expected to kiss a girl good night, and might even be insulting;

but this particular young man was almost pathetically deferential. Grace was ashamed of herself for not inviting him to call, but she shrank from encouraging his further attentions; he might very easily become a nuisance.

Again, she went to Rosemary Terrace, a dance and supper place on the edge of town, in company with a young man who carried a bottle on his hip to which he referred with proud complacency, as though it were the symbol of his freedom as an American citizen. The large dance hall was crowded; the patrons were clearly the worse for their indulgence in the liquor carried by their escorts; the dancing of many of the visitors was vulgar; the place was hot and noisy and the air heavy with tobacco smoke. Grace's young man kept assuring her that the Rosemary was the sportiest place in town; you didn't see any dead ones there. His desire to be thought a sport would have been amusing if he hadn't so strenuously insisted upon explaining that he was truly of the great company of the elect to whom the laws of God and man were as nothing. When Grace asked to be taken home he hinted that there were other places presumably even less reputable, to which they might go. But he did not press the matter, when, reaching the Durland gate, he tried to kiss her and she, to mark the termination of their acquaintance, slapped him.

These experiences were, she reflected, typical of what she must look forward to unless she compromised with her conscience and accepted Irene's philosophy of life.

She had replied immediately to Trenton's letter from St. Louis with a brief note which she made as colorless as possible. She knew that it was for her to decide whether to see more of him or drop the ac-

quaintance. He was not a man to force his attentions upon any young woman if he had reason to think them unwelcome. Hearing nothing from him for several days she had decided that he had settled the matter himself when she received a note explaining that he had been very busy but would start East the next day. He hoped she would dine with him on Thursday night and named the Indianapolis hotel where her reply would reach him.

"Don't turn him down!" exclaimed Irene when Grace told her Trenton was coming. "He wouldn't ask you if he didn't want you. Tommy skipped for New York last night so it's a safe bet that Ward's stopping on purpose to see you."

"I don't know—" began Grace doubtfully.

"Oh, have a heart! There's no harm in eating dinner with a married man in a hotel where you'd get by even if all your family walked in and caught you! Of course Tommy can't appear with me at any public place here at home, but it's different with you and Ward. He doesn't know a dozen people in town."

"I wouldn't want to offend him," Grace replied slowly, a prey to uncertainty; but she withheld her acceptance until the morning of the day of Trenton's arrival.

XI

When she reached the Hotel Sycamore at seven o'clock he was waiting for her at the entrance.

"On time to the minute!" he exclaimed. "I took you at your word that you'd rather not have me call for you."

"Thanks; but it was easier this way," she answered.

He had been so much in her thoughts, and she had

considered him from so many angles that at first she was shy in his presence. But by the time they were seated in the dining room her diffidence was passing. He appeared younger than at The Shack, but rather more distinguished; it might have been the effect of his dinner coat; and she noticed that he was the only man in the room who had dressed for dinner.

"You've been busy of course and I've been up to my eyes in work," he said; "so we'll dismiss business. Shall we talk of the weather or see what we can do to save the world from destruction!"

"Oh, I've had a lot of ideas about things since I saw you," she said. "Half of them were right and half wrong."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "our old friend conscience!"

"Yes," she replied, meeting his gaze squarely. "I've been trying to decide a thousand questions, but I've got nowhere!"

"Terrible! But I'm glad to find that you're so human; most of us are like that. Honest, now, you weren't at all sure you wanted to see me tonight!"

"No," she assented under his smiling gaze; "I didn't send the answer to your note till nearly noon!"

"So I noticed from the hotel stamp on the envelope! But I'd have been very much disappointed if you'd refused."

His tone was too serious for comfort. She felt that she must have a care lest he discover the attraction he had for her.

"Oh, you'd have got over it! You know you would. You needn't have dined alone—Tommy's out of town, but there's Irene!"

"Much as I admire Irene she would be no substitute! I was sincerely anxious to see you again, if only to make sure you were still on earth."

"Oh, I have no intention of leaving it!"

She was finding it easy to be flippant with him. Whatever liking he had for her was no doubt due to the seriousness she had manifested in their talk at The Shack. And the effect of that talk had been to awaken a sympathy and interest on both sides; in her case she knew that it was trifle more than that. She was sorry now that she had kissed him; she was puzzled that she had ever had the courage to do it, though it was such a kiss as she might have given any man older than herself in the same circumstances. She had heard of women, very young women, who were able to exert a strong influence upon men much older than themselves. She felt for the first time the power of sex—at least she had never before thought of it in the phrases that now danced through her brain. If he was annoyed not to find her as interesting and agreeable as at The Shack he was successful in concealing his disappointment. He continued to be unfailingly courteous, meeting her rejoinders with characteristic mockeries until she began to feel ashamed of her lack of friendliness. He deserved better of her than this.

"We're going to the theatre; did you know that?" he asked toward the end of the dinner. "And we're going to be fashionably late."

"'Stolen Stars!' Oh, that's perfectly marvelous," she exclaimed. "I've been just dying to see it!"

"Then it's lucky that you can live and see it!" Through the performance the thought kept recurring to her that he meant to be kind. No one had ever been so kind or shown her so flattering a deference as Ward Trenton. She was proud to be sitting beside him. When the lights went up after the first act a buzz of talk in one of the boxes drew her attention, and she caught a glimpse of Bob Cummings. At the same

moment he saw her and bowed. There were six in the party and she decided that Bob's wife was the young woman he most rarely addressed. Evelyn was not beautiful; she was gratified to have Trenton's confirmation of her opinion on this point when she directed his attention to the box party.

"I'll be here for several days," said Trenton when they reached the Durland house and he stood for a moment on the doorstep. "Could you give me another evening? Tomorrow night I'm tied up with a business appointment, but may we say day after tomorrow?"

"Yes," she assented, "but isn't there danger of seeing too much of me?"

"I'll take the risk!" he said. "And thank you ever so much."

She fell asleep glad that she was to see him again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

THE second evening with Trenton was very like the first except that after dinner at the Sycamore they attended a concert given by a world-famous violinist. Again as under the spell of Bob Cummings' playing at Miss Reynolds', Grace was caught away into a wonder-world, where she wandered like a disembodied spirit seeking some vestige of a personality that had not survived her transition to another realm. She was assailed by new and fleeting emotions, in which she studied Trenton and tried to define her attitude toward him, conscious that the time might be close at hand when some definition would be necessary. Now and then she caught a glimpse of his rapt look and saw the lines about his mouth tighten. Once he clasped his hands as though, in response to some inner prompting, he were attempting by a physical act to arrest some disturbing trend of his thoughts.

There was a fineness in his face that she had not before fully appreciated, and it was his fineness and nobility, Grace assured herself, that appealed to her. Then there were moments when she was undecided whether she loved or hated him, not knowing that this is a curious phase which women of highly sensitive natures often experience at the first consciousness of a man's power over them. She saw man as the hunter and woman as his prey. Then with a quick revulsion she freed herself of the thought and drifted happily with the tide of harmony.

When they left the theatre Trenton asked whether

she felt like walking. The night was clear and the air keen and stimulating.

"Of course; it would be a shame to ride! That music would carry me a thousand miles," she answered.

As soon as they were free of the crowd he began to talk of music, its emotional appeal, its power to dissociate the hearer from material things.

"I never felt it so much before," he said. "I'm afraid there's not much poetry in me. I'm not much affected by things that I can't reduce to a formula, and I'm a little suspicious of anything that lifts me off the earth as that fiddle did. If I exposed myself to music very often it would ruin me for business."

"Oh, never that! I feel music tremendously; everybody must! It wakes up all manner of hopes and ambitions even if they don't live very long. That violin really made me want to climb!"

"Yes; I can understand that. For a few minutes I was conscious myself of reaching up the ladder for a higher round. It's dangerous to feel so keenly. I wonder if there ever comes a time when we don't feel any more—really feel a desire to bump against the stars; when the spirit goes dead and for the rest of our days we just settle into a rut with no hope of ever pulling out? I have a dread of that. It's ghastly to think of. Marking time! Going through the motions of being alive when you're really dead!"

"Oh, don't even think of it! You could never be like that!"

"Maybe I'm like that now!"

"You're clear off the key!" she cried. "Of course you're not at the end of things. It's wicked to talk that way."

"Do you really think that?" he asked eagerly. "Do you see any hope ahead for me?"

"You know you see it yourself! We wouldn't any of us go on living if we didn't see some hope ahead." Then with greater animation she added:

"You're not a man to sit down at the roadside and burst into tears because things don't go to suit you! I don't believe you're that kind at all. If you are —well, I'm disappointed!"

"Now you've got me with my back to the wall!" he laughed. "No man ever wants a woman to think him a coward. I'll keep away from all music hereafter except the snappiest jazz. But give music the benefit of the doubt; it may not have been the fiddle at all!"

"More likely you ate too much dinner!"

"Impossible! The ostrich has nothing on me when it comes to digestion. Maybe you're the cause of my depression! Please consider that for a moment!"

"Oh, that's terribly unkind! If I depress you this must be our last meeting."

"You know I didn't mean that, it's because——"

"Don't begin becausing! You know you're in a tight corner; you hint that I've given you a bad evening just by sitting beside you at a concert—and a very beautiful concert at that."

"The mistake is mine! You haven't the slightest respect for my feelings. I show you the wounds in my very soul and you laugh at them."

"I certainly am not going to weep my eyes out merely because you let a few bars of music throw you. I had a fit of the blues too; several times I thought I was going to cry. How embarrassed you'd have been!"

"No; I should have held your hand until you regained your composure!"

"Then we'd both have been led out by the ushers!"

He joined with her in playing whimsically upon all

the possibilities of their ejection. They would have been arrested for disturbing a public gathering and their names would have figured in the police reports, probably with pictorial embellishments. This sort of fooling was safe; she thought perhaps he meant to maintain the talk on an impersonal plane but in a moment he said:

"I'm going away tomorrow, first home to Pittsburgh for about a week; then to New York. I may not get back here for two or three weeks; I'm mixed up in some things that I can't neglect. I'd like to think you'll miss me!"

"Oh, I always miss my friends when they go away," she replied. Then realizing the banality of this she laughed and added: "How silly that sounded!"

"Then you mean you wouldn't miss me?"

"Of course I didn't mean that!"

Under a street lamp she saw in his face once more the grave troubled look that she had observed at intervals during the concert. It was foolish to question now that his interest in her was something more than a passing fancy. Her thoughts flew to the other woman, the wife of whom he had spoken at The Shack only to apologize for it in his letter from St. Louis. He was thinking of her of course; it was impossible for him to ignore the fact that he had a wife. And again as so many times before she speculated as to whether he might not still love this woman and be seeking diversion elsewhere out of sheer loneliness. But as they passed into the shadows again, her hand resting lightly on his arm, she experienced suddenly a strong desire to be kind to him. She was profoundly moved by the thought that it was in her power to pour out to him in great measure the affection and comradeship which he had confessed he hungered for.

They had crossed the canal bridge and were nearing the Durland house. Trenton was accommodating himself perforce to her rapid pace. The tonic air kept her pulses throbbing. She was sure that she loved this man; that the difference in their years was as nothing weighed against his need for her. Tonight, she knew, marked a crisis in their relationship. If she parted from him without making it clear that she wished never to see him again she would be putting herself wholly at the mercy of a fate that might bear her up or down. With only a block more to traverse she battled with herself, summoned all her courage to resist him, only to find that her will was unequal to the contest.

Deep in her heart she did not want to send him away with no hope of seeing him again. He was her one link with the great world beyond the city in which, without his visits to look forward to, she was doomed to lead a colorless, monotonous existence. She was moved by a compassion for him, poignantly tender, that swept away all sense of reality and transcended the bounds of time and space. The very thought of losing him, of not knowing where he would be in the endless tomorrows, only that she would never see him again, was like a pain in her heart. The need in him spoke to the need in her—for companionship, help, affection.

They seemed vastly isolated in the quiet street, as though the world had gone away and left them to settle their affairs with only the stars for witnesses. It had been easy to parry Bob Cummings's attempts to assume a lover-like attitude toward her. But with Trenton this would be impossible. With him it would be necessary to state in the plainest terms that their acquaintance must end.

Nothing had been said since her last remark and

if she meant to thrust him away from her she must act quickly. In a winning fashion of his own he was frank and forthright. She found it difficult to anticipate him and prepare her replies. There was no leer in him and he did not take refuge in timid gallantries; he addressed her as a man who felt that he had a right to a hearing. And this, in her confused, bewildered senses, gave dignity to the situation. He loved her and she loved him—she was sure she loved him—and her heart was in a wild tumult. She was afraid to speak lest the merest commonplace might betray her eagerness to confess her love for him.

He stepped in front of her and clasped the hand that lay lightly on his arm.

"I've got to say it; I must say it now," he said in grave even tones. "No woman ever meant to me what you mean. The first night I met you I knew it had come—the thing I had hoped for—and sometimes had dreaded,—a woman I could know as I've never known any woman, not my wife or any other! After I left you I couldn't get you out of my mind." He paused for an instant, then went on hurriedly with undisguised intensity of feeling. "You may think me mad when I've seen you so little; and I know I have no right to love you at all! But I do love you! I want you to belong to me!"

A gust of wind caught up a mass of leaves from the gutter and flung them about their feet as though to remind them of the mutability of all things. He had said that he loved her; almost savagely he had demanded that she give herself to him. It was incredible that he cared so much, that his desire for her could be so great.

He released her hand as though in sign that he wanted her to speak without compulsion. He waited

quietly, his shoulders thrown a little forward, and in the dim starlight she saw his eyes, bright and eager, searching her own.

"You know I care," she said softly.

The words fell from her lips inevitably; no other reply was possible, and it seemed that a great weight had lifted from her heart and that in entrusting herself to him she had found security and peace. She questioned nothing, feeling his arms about her, his kiss warm on her lips. All her doubts were lost in the joy of the moment in which he had confessed his love for her. It was a strange place for the pledging of love and the moment was not to be prolonged.

"We must go on, dear," she said laying her cheek against his for an instant. The touch of her face caused him to clasp her again.

"Oh, my dearest one!" he cried hoarsely.

As they went on, loitering to delay the moment of parting, they caught hands like happy children.

"I don't see how you can love me," she said with the anxiety of new love for confirmations and assurances. "I don't belong to your world."

"There's the strangest thing of all!" he exclaimed. "We are born into a new world that is all ours. We have inherited all the kingdoms tonight."

"And the stars up there—do they shine just for us?" she asked, bringing herself closer to him. "And can we keep everyone else out of our world? I want it all to be our very own. Oh, it's so sweet, so wonderful!"

"It's a miracle beyond any words," he said, "to know that you care. It's easy for me to love you; I loved you in that very first hour we spent together.

We don't account for things like that, that come so suddenly and without warning; we merely accept them. I've fought this; I want you to know that I've fought it."

"Oh, so have I! But—why did you fight it?"

Her voice betrayed her confused emotions. Her sense of right was as nothing against the belief that he loved her and that she loved him. A masterful tide had caught them up and borne them far, leaving them islanded on territory remote and touched with a mystical light that souls had never known before.

She was now fully persuaded that henceforth her life was to be bound up with his; that until death took one or the other they would never face separation. Space and distance were as nothing; if he went to far and waste places there would be still the strong spiritual tie which it pleased her to think was the real bond between them—something which, in her absolute surrender, she felt to be above all laws of men and of kinship with heavenly things. It struck her as odd that she was able so thoroughly to analyze her sensations, seeking and finding explanation and justification cleansed of all passion.

"I know I have no right to your love; none whatever," he said steadily. "There are people who would call me a scoundrel for saying what I have just said to you. But every man in my plight feels that his case is different. I've thought of all this in the plainest terms, not sparing myself."

"It would be like you to do that," she replied.

Now that she had taken him for her lover she saw him as a paragon of generosity and nobility. He would not spare himself; she was anxious to apply balm to his conscience, to make him understand that her happiness was so complete that nothing else mattered.

"Just so you love me!" she said gently. "Nothing could be so dear as just knowing that you care. Oh, do I mean so much to you?"

"Everything," he exclaimed and lifted her hand and kissed it.

"That's the way it has to be—everything or nothing. I never loved any one before."

"I'm so glad! I was afraid to ask you that. I had even thought there might be some one else—some younger man——"

"Stop! We're not going to talk of ages," she laughed, with a quick gesture laying her hand for a moment against his lips. "It must be understood right now that you're not a day over twenty-five."

"You're going to spoil me! And you don't know how much I want to be spoiled."

"You poor dear! I'm going to love petting and spoiling you!"

Instantly it occurred to her that the other woman, the unknown wife of her frequent conjecture, had neither petted nor spoiled him and that this accounted for his eagerness for a new experience. A cloud crossed the bright heaven of her happiness. His wife was not to be relegated to oblivion merely because he had found another object for his affections. The wife had a very real existence in Grace's imagination; to Trenton's lightly limned sketch the girl had added a line here and there until she fancied she possessed a very true portrait of Mrs. Trenton. Somewhere there existed a Mrs. Ward Trenton, who wrote books and lectured and otherwise advertised herself as a vital being.

"Dear little girl!" said Trenton tenderly. "You are all the world to me. Do you understand?"

"I must believe that," she said.

"There's nothing I can offer you now—neither a

home nor the protection of my name. It's got to be just love that's our tie. I'm not going to deceive you about that."

"Yes, I understand what it means," she answered.

"You must believe that I'll do the best I can to make you happy. Love that doesn't bring happiness is an empty and worthless thing. You don't know how much I count on you. I'm laying a burden on you; I'm clutching at you for all the things I've missed out of my life."

"Yes; I know dear."

"There's something not fair about it—about casting myself upon you as I'm doing," he said doggedly.

"I'm proud that you want me! I want to fill your heart and your life."

"You can; you do even now! But first of all I want you to be sure—sure of yourself, dear. There must be no regrets afterward. I can't see you again before I go, but I'll write."

"I shall miss you so! You *will* write to me!" she cried, feeling already the loneliness of the days of his impending absence. His calmness was disconcerting but she readily forgave this as she would have forgiven him anything. He was thinking of the long future no doubt, planning ways of seeing her.

"Promise me you'll consider everything."

"It's enough that we love each other!" she replied softly.

"You're not a child but a woman, able to see it all in every light. You must be very sure that you care; that you do love me."

"I'm very sure, dear," she said, not a little disturbed by his solicitude, fearing that he himself might now be a prey to misgivings.

"You can write to me at the addresses I'll send. And then wire me when you're quite sure—not till then!"

"Yes; I'll do as you say. But tell me again that you love me! I shall be so lonely without you!"

"With all my heart I love you. I wish we need never part again. Some day that will be. Some day I can have you with me always! But now——"

The sentence died on his lips. What could be now he did not say, shrank from saying perhaps. It was not for her to express in words what could be now. She felt a sudden strong impulse to speak of his wife; to ask him whether he did not still care for her. But it was in her heart, the battleground of many and confused emotions, to give him the benefit of every doubt. Her forces of defense had mutinied and left her powerless even to question him. The joy of the knowledge that he loved her and that she returned his love thrilled her like the song of triumphant bugles.

Her heart was throbbing as they passed through the Durland gate. At the door he took her in his arms.

"My dearest! I wouldn't lie to you; I love you with all my heart. You will write me; and don't forget the telegram. I shall come flying at the first possible moment after I get that. And don't trouble about anything. I want you to say you trust me and are sure of me."

His kisses smothered her replies.

"Promise to be careful of yourself, dear. I should die without you!"

There were tears in her eyes as she fumbled for her latch key. She watched him as he struck out with a long stride toward the city. She thought

that he looked back and waved his hand out of the shadows just as she opened the door.

II

It was long before she slept but she rose obedient to the summons of the alarm clock and assisted as usual in the preparation of breakfast. At the table her silence and preoccupation caused her mother to scrutinize her closely.

"You don't seem quite like yourself, Grace. Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, there's nothing at all the matter. I had a hard day at the store yesterday."

"Maybe you ate something for supper that didn't agree with you."

Grace read into this suggestion a hint that her mother and sister were not without their curiosity as to where she had dined and the manner in which she had spent the remainder of the evening. They had been accepting so meekly her silence as to her evenings away from home that it occurred to Grace that it would serve to allay suspicion if she told occasionally just what she had been doing.

"I had dinner at the Sycamore with an acquaintance —a man from out of town—and we went to the concert. The music was perfectly wonderful. And then we walked home. Nothing terribly exciting in that!"

"I thought I heard voices at the door just before you came in," said Mrs. Durland with an effort at indifference that was only partly successful.

"Very likely you did, mamma. Mr. Trenton and I walked home; it seemed a pity to ride when the night was so fine and there was all that music still ringing in our ears."

She was pleased with her own audacity and smiled as she saw Ethel and her mother exchange glances. But having ventured so far it would be necessary now to explain how she had met Trenton and she was prepared with a small lie with which to fortify the truth when she saw that something more was expected.

"Mr. Trenton, did you say, Grace?" inquired Mrs. Durland as though not sure she had heard aright.

"Yes, mother; Mr. Ward Trenton, of Pittsburgh. I knew his niece very well at the University, and as he comes here now and then Mabel wrote and asked him to look me up. He's ever so nice. He's been everywhere and talks wonderfully. He's a mechanical engineer and rated very high, isn't he, daddy?"

Trenton's name had impinged upon Durland's consciousness and he put down the morning newspaper to which he had been referring from time to time during the consumption of his breakfast.

"Ward Trenton? Yes, he's one of the ablest engineers in the country. Did you say he'd been in town, Grace?"

"Yes, he comes here now and then. I had dinner with him last night at the Sycamore and we went to the concert. I meant to tell you about him. He knows of you; he says he's always stumbling into you in the patent office records."

"Did Trenton say that?" asked Durland, greatly pleased.

"Yes; he spoke of you in the kindest way, father."

"You don't say! I wouldn't have thought he'd ever heard of me. He's in touch with all the big industrial concerns of the country," said Durland. "I guess there is hardly a man whose word is worth more than Trenton's. I read just the other day, in one of the trade journals, an address he made somewhere on shop

efficiency. His opinions are quoted a good deal; he knows what he's talking about."

Her father's manifestation of interest in a man so eminent in his own field did not prevent Ethel from taking advantage of Grace's unexpected frankness to ask:

"Was it Mr. Trenton you were with at the theatre a few nights ago? One of the girls in the office said she saw you there with a very distinguished looking man."

"The very same!" Grace replied promptly. "You know Mr. Trenton is awful keen about Mabel, so when she wrote him that I was at Shipley's he came in to see me."

Having gone so far with the imaginary niece she thought it best to endow her with a full name.

"Mabel Conwell is awfully nice, though you wouldn't exactly call her pretty."

"Does she live here?" asked Mrs. Durland.

"Oh, no! Her home's in Jeffersonville or New Albany, I forget which. It's one of those Ohio river towns."

"It was certainly kind of her to have Mr. Trenton look you up," said Mrs. Durland. "But I wish you'd asked him to the house. It doesn't seem just right for you to be going out with a man your family doesn't know. I'm not saying, dear, that there's any impropriety; only I think it would give him a better impression of all of us if we met him."

"Oh, I meant to bring him up but he's so terribly busy. He works everywhere he goes right up to the last minute. And it was much simpler to meet him at the Sycamore."

"He's married, is he not?" asked Ethel.

"Oh, yes!" said Grace, heartily regretting now that

she had opened the way for this question. "His wife is Mary Graham Trenton who write and lectures."

"That woman," exclaimed Mrs. Durland, plainly horrified. "She is one of the most dangerous of all the foes of decency in this country! Last spring we had a discussion of her ideas in the West End Club. I hadn't known how utterly without shame a woman could be till one of our members wrote a paper about her."

"I've heard that she's very wealthy," interposed Ethel in a tone which suggested that, no matter how utterly destructive of public morals Mrs. Trenton's ideas might be, as a rich woman she was not wholly beyond the pale. "It's all the more remarkable that she's opposed to marriage and nearly everything else, or pretends to be, when she belongs to one of the oldest American families and inherited her wealth."

"I don't know that Mr. Trenton accepts her ideas," said Grace. "He hasn't discussed them with me. He seemed rather amused when I told him I'd read her 'Clues to a New Social Order'."

"You haven't read that awful thing?" cried Mrs. Durland.

"Why, certainly, mother; I read it last winter. It's not so awfully shocking; I suppose there are a good many people who believe as Mrs. Trenton does."

"How can you speak so, Grace! What would become of the home and the family if such ideas prevailed? That woman's positively opposed to marriage."

"Oh, I don't believe it's as bad as that! I think it's more her idea that where marriages are unhappy it's cruel to make people live together. But, you needn't be afraid that Mr. Trenton's trying to convert me to his wife's notions. I don't believe he is

terribly tickled to have her gallivanting over the country lecturing."

"You can't be too careful, you know, Grace, about letting a married man pay you attentions. People are bound to talk. And Mrs. Trenton, being known for her loose ideas on marriage, naturally causes people to look twice at her husband."

"And at any woman her husband pays attention to," Ethel added.

"Of course I'm careful what I do," replied Grace. "Mr. Trenton is a perfect gentleman in every way and just as kind and considerate as can be. He gave me two of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent. You certainly can't object to my knowing a man like that."

"No, dear," replied Mrs. Durland, "except that it seems strange for a daughter of mine to be meeting a married man and having dinner with him and going to the theatre when I don't know him at all."

Durland had lingered, pretending to be looking for something in the paper but really prepared to support Grace in the event that his wife and Ethel showed a disposition to carry their criticisms further.

"I suppose we have to put up with such things," said Ethel, "but that doesn't make them right. I hope, Grace, you won't let your independence carry you *too* far."

"Well, Mr. Trenton has passed on and I don't know when he'll turn up here again, so you needn't worry."

"It's fine you can know a man like Trenton," Durland ventured from the hall door.

"Here's an idea!" cried Grace, springing after him to hold his overcoat, "the next time Mr. Trenton comes to town I'll try to have you meet him."

"I think some of us ought to meet him," said Mrs. Durland, who had begun to clear the table.

"By all means," Ethel affirmed. "I think the family dignity calls for at least that!"

"Yes, we must preserve the family dignity at any hazard," Grace retorted.

Having buttoned her father into his coat she snatched his hat and planted it at a rakish angle on his head. He submitted good naturedly, pleased as he always was by her attentions.

"You bring Trenton down sometime, Grace. I've some old junk I'd be glad to show him," he said, glancing furtively at his wife.

"Grand! Between us we ought to be able to put something over on him."

She flung her arm across his shoulder and walked with him to the front door.

No highly developed talent for mind reading was necessary to an understanding of the mental operations of Mrs. Durland and Ethel in matters pertaining to the father and younger daughter. When Grace entered the kitchen she knew that she had interrupted a conference bearing upon her acquaintance with Trenton. Her mother and Ethel would study the matter in all its aspects. She derived a cynical satisfaction from the knowledge that her apparent frankness was probably causing them more anxiety than an evasion or a downright lie.

III

Grace's thoughts raced madly in the days that followed. She saw herself in new aspects, dramatized herself in new and fascinating situations. She was like a child peering into a succession of alluring shop win-

dows, the nature and value of whose strange wares it only imperfectly understands. Life was disclosing itself, opening long vistas before her. As to men she now believed that she knew a great deal. Confident that she loved Trenton and without regret that she had confessed her love she did not question her happiness. She lived in a paradise whose walls were fashioned of the stuff that dreams are made of. It pleased her to think of herself as a figure of romance and she got from the public library several novels in which young women, imaginably like herself, had given their all for love. She was satisfied that her own case was far more justifiable than those of these heroines.

Her heart was filled with kindness toward all the world. On the day that brought her Trenton's first letter she went to her father's new shop in the Power Building carrying lunch for two from a cafeteria. Her father's silence in his hours at home, his absorption in his scientific books, had for her an increasing pathos. Mrs. Durland referred not infrequently to the fallen estate of the family in terms well calculated to wound him from the very tone of helpless resignation in which they were uttered.

Durland pushed his hat back on his head and stared as Grace appeared in the door of his little shop.

"What's the matter, Grace? Anything happened?" he asked with his bewildered air.

"Not a thing, daddy. I just thought I'd come around and have lunch; so here's sandwiches for two."

"I never eat lunch," he said, turning reluctantly from the bench at which he had been at work.

"Well, you're going to today!"

Over his protests she cleared a space on the bench and laid out the contents of her package—sandwiches, cakes and apples. She dusted off a chair for him

and then swung herself on to the bench within easy reach of the food. She ignored his warning that there was grease on the bench and flung him a paper napkin.

"The banquet's begun! Now proceed and tell me how every little thing's a going."

"Just about the same, Grace. I'm working on an idea or two. Not sure yet just what I've got, but I think maybe I'm on to something that'll turn out big."

"You're bound to, daddy! You work so hard!"

"Cummings may have scrapped me too soon," he muttered and looked at her with an ironic grin and a fanatical gleam in his eyes that caused her to wonder for a moment whether from his lonely brooding he might not be going mad.

A man came in to see about some patterns he had ordered. They were not ready and even while Durland expressed his regret at the delay Grace saw that his thoughts were still upon his inventions. The customer manifested impatience, remarking angrily as he left that if his work wasn't ready the next day he would take it elsewhere.

"Really, daddy, you oughtn't to keep people waiting when you take their jobs. If you'll only build up this pattern and model business you can make a good thing of it."

"You're right, Grace. But I can't keep my mind off my own work. I know all the weaknesses of my old things that Cummings is making. I'm going to put him out of business!"

"That's all right, but you mustn't take jobs for other people unless you mean to do them right away. This place is in an awful mess!"

As she began straightening up a litter of papers on

one end of the bench a bill for the rent of the room caught her eye.

"Don't look at these things, Grace!" he pleaded, as he tried to snatch the bill. "I'll be able to pay that in a day or two. I got a check coming for a model and it'll cover the rent."

Her questioning elicited the information that the check had been expected for several weeks and that the man for whom the model had been made left town without leaving his address.

"It seems pretty uncertain, daddy, and this rent's three weeks over due. I have a little money in the trust company and I'll send my check for it."

"I don't like taking your money, Grace," he said as she thrust the bill into her purse.

"Don't you worry about that. I'd be ashamed if I didn't help you when you've always been so good to me."

"I don't see where I've done much for you. I never expected you girls would have to work. You know I'm sorry, Grace!"

"Well, I'm perfectly happy, so don't you worry."

She took his old-fashioned watch from his pocket and noted the time.

"I've got to skip."

"Nice of you to come round, Grace; but you're always good to me. By the way, I guess you'd better not tell your mother about the rent. She wouldn't like my taking your money."

"Then we won't say a word!" She whispered, touched by his fear of her mother's criticisms. She flung her arms about him and hugged him till he cried for mercy.

Her savings account was further depleted the next Saturday. She was surprised to find Roy waiting for her when she left the department at her lunch hour.

"No, sis; I didn't write I was coming. I've got to go back on the first train."

"But of course you'll see mother!"

"Well, I thought I might call her up," he said evasively.

"Call her up!" Grace repeated sharply. "If you're not going out home don't call her! She'd never forgive you. Come and have lunch with me so we can talk."

Roy Durland was tall and fair, a handsome young fellow, though his face might have been thought too delicate, a trifle too feminine. One would have known that as a child he had been pointed out as a very pretty boy.

"I hate like thunder bothering you, sis," he began when they were seated in the lunch room. "But I'm up against it hard. Harry Sayles and I got a car from Thornton's garage the other night and took a couple of girls out for a ride. It was Harry's party,—he was going to pay for the machine. Well, we were letting 'er go a pretty good clip, I guess, when something went wrong with the steering gear and we ran smash into a barn and mussed things up considerable. Harry and Freda Barnes were on the front seat and got cut up a little. We had to wake up a farmer and telephone to Thornton to send out for us. Thornton wants fifty dollars to cover his damage and of course I've got to stand half of it; that's only square. He's pretty ugly about it and says if we don't come through with the money he'll take it up with the college people. Now I know, Grace,—"

"Yes, you know you have no business going on joy rides, particularly with a boy like Harry Sayles who's always in nasty scrapes! Who's Freda Barnes? I don't remember a student of that name."

"Well, she isn't exactly a student," Roy replied,

nervously buttering a piece of bread, "but she's a perfectly nice girl. She works in Singleton's store."

"That's one girl; who was the other?"

"Sadie Denton; you must remember her; she was cashier in Fulton's for a while."

"No; I never heard of her," said Grace eyeing him coldly. "You know plenty of nice girls on the campus and plenty of decent, self-respecting boys. There's not the slightest excuse for you. I suppose Harry provided the whiskey. There *was* whiskey of course. Come, out with the truth about it!"

"Well," Roy admitted shamefacedly, "we did have a bottle but we didn't drink enough of it to make any difference. Really, Grace, it was an accident; no one could have helped it."

"I'm not so sure of that. I understand now why you didn't want to show yourself at home. The day I left college you promised to behave yourself and put in your best licks on your work and already you're mixed up in a nasty scrape. It would break mother's heart if she knew it. Mother's crazy about you; she'd sacrifice all the rest of us for you, and you evidently don't appreciate it at all!"

"I understand all that, sis. I told you I'd be glad to quit and let you stay on and finish. My hanging on in the law school is all a mistake."

"Well, don't whimper! It's too late to weaken now. You were old enough to know what you were doing when you took up the law. It begins to look as though you simply wanted to hang on at the university to loaf and have a good time. You don't deserve any pity for getting into a mess like this. I suppose the story's all over the campus."

"I don't think so," he answered quickly, with hope

lighting his eyes. "Thornton promised to keep his mouth shut if we'd pay his bill. And Harry and the girls won't talk."

"I imagine not! And you're letting me into the secret merely in the hope of getting twenty-five dollars out of me."

"Don't be so hard on me, Grace! I know I'm a fool and haven't sense enough to say no when anybody asks me to do things like that. But if you'll help me out this time I swear never to bother you again."

"All right, Roy. I haven't the money here but I'll walk over to the trust company with you and get it. But be sure this doesn't happen again. I don't want to rub it in but it may help you to keep straight if I tell you that it's just about all we can do to get by at home. Father is earning nothing; the family's clean busted. Mother's pinching and denying herself to be ready to give you a start when you leave the law school. I'm not complaining; I'm only telling you this because I don't think you mean to make it any harder for the rest of us than you can."

"It's all a silly mistake," he said dully, "this trying to make a lawyer of me. I've a good notion to have it out with mother now and tell her I've come home to stay."

"If you do you're the rankest kind of quitter! You could have refused to take up the law when you graduated from college, but now that you have only a few more months you've simply got to make good. Mother would die of humiliation if you stopped. Come along; we've got to step lively."

"Now, Roy," she said as she gave him the money at the teller's window: "Please behave yourself!"

He left her at the store, repeating his promises that

he would never again ask her for money and assuring her that he would make the most of his time for the remainder of the year.

She had dealt with him more severely than it was in her heart to do and she was a little sorry that she hadn't shown more tolerance for his misadventure. Fairly considered, his joy-riding with undesirable companions was hardly more censurable than her participation in Kemp's party at The Shack, a matter as to which her conscience was still at times a little tender.

IV

Trenton wrote every day, letters in which there was no attempt to disguise his love for her. He hadn't warned her against keeping his letters but she destroyed each one after writing her reply. These answers were little more than notes which she wrote and rewrote in trepidation lest she say too much or too little. Now that he had declared himself and was reiterating daily his complete absorption in her as to everything that affected his future she could afford to risk certain reserves and coynesses. But she did love him; she had positively settled this question. It was a tremendous thing that had happened to her, the realization of a great love, love awakened at a first meeting and endowed with all the charm of romance and the felicity of clandestine adventure. In one of her notes, written with her door locked—her family imagined her to be zealously devoting herself to her French studies—she wrote:

It is all like a dream. I never cease to marvel that *you* should care for me. . . . Every note you send me is a happy surprise. If one failed to come I

think I should die. . . . You wanted me to take time to think. That is like my good and true knight. But I want you to consider too,—everything. . . . Your world is so much bigger than mine. Any day you may meet some one so much finer than I am, so much worthier of your love. . . . I like to think that it all had to be just as it has been,—you and I wandering toward each other, guided and urged on by destiny.

To her intimations that he might have regrets he replied in his next message with every assurance that he, too, shared her feeling that their meeting had been predestined of all time. Now and then in his life, he wrote, he had felt the hand of a directing and beneficent fate. She wondered how he would have replied to a direct question as to the forces that had combined to bring about his marriage to the woman he had no doubt loved at some time, but she refrained. In Grace's thoughts, Mrs. Ward Trenton, the Mary Graham Trenton who sought clues to social problems and moved restlessly about the country proclaiming revolutionary ideas, was receding further and further toward a vanishing point.

At the end of a week she became restless, eager for Trenton's return. She several times considered telegraphing him to make haste, but after going once to the telegraph office at her lunch hour and writing the message she tore it up. He had asked her to wire whenever she was sure; the mere sending of a telegram would commit her irrevocably. It was not so easy as she had imagined to write the words which meant that after pondering the matter with the gravity it demanded she was ready to enter into a relationship with him which would have no honest status, no protec-

tion, but would be just such an arrangement as Irene maintained with Kemp.

Irene, aware of Trenton's daily letters, now refrained from giving her further encouragement to the affair. On the other hand she seemed disposed to counsel caution.

"Some days you seem as cheerful as a spring robin and then again you don't seem so chipper. You don't want to take your love affairs so hard!"

"Oh, we're just having a little flirtation, that's all," said Grace carelessly.

"That's not the way you're acting! You're terribly intense, Grace. I knew you had temperament, but I didn't know you had so much. But I'll say this for Ward, that he's a fine, manly fellow,—frankly a much finer type than Tommy Kemp. Tommy's a sport and Ward isn't. Ward really has ideals, but such as Tommy has don't worry him much."

This left Grace, again a prey to doubts, wondering whether after all Trenton was so utterly different from Kemp. Intellectually he was a higher type than Tommy Kemp, but when it came to morals he was not a bit better.

V

Grace had not yet wholly escaped from the effect of Dr. Ridgely's sermon, with its warning against the too-readily-found excuse for wrong-doing. She continued to observe carefully her associates in Shipley's and other business girls she became acquainted with, and she had no reason for suspecting that by far the greater number were not high-minded young women who met cheerily all the circumstances of their lives. She found herself stumbling uncomfortably over the

excuses she made for herself. Other girls forced to labor and blessed with equal charm and wit did not find it necessary "to play around with married men" as the phrase went, or encourage the attentions of young unmarried men who were not likely to show them every respect. There were societies and associations whose purpose was to safeguard young womanhood; some of her new acquaintances were members of such organizations. She accepted invitations to go for lunch or supper to several of these, but thought them dull.

Finding that Grace hadn't attempted to enlist Miss Reynolds in the girl's club of Dr. Ridgley's church, Ethel Durland had sent the pastor himself to invite that lady to one of the meetings.

"I hope you will come Tuesday night," said Ethel, when she reported this to Grace. "We want Miss Reynolds to see the scope of our work and your being there will be a help. Maybe you'd ask some of the girls in Shipley's? We want to have a record attendance. And we want the girls to bring their young men friends with them. It's our idea that the girls should feel that the church is like another home."

The attempt to establish a new high record of attendance brought twenty-five girls and four young men to the church parlors. Three of the young women were from Shipley's and they had gone at Grace's earnest solicitation; four were Servians, employed in a garment factory, and they were convoyed by young men of their own race.

"I wish you'd be specially nice to those Servian girls," Ethel remarked to Grace. "It wasn't easy to get them to come, but they brought their beaux with them. We must be sure they have a good time."

The beaux did not seem to relish the hopeless min-

ority of their sex. The meeting was opened formally by Ethel as chairman of the entertainment committee. She introduced Dr. Ridgely, who expressed the hope that the club would develop into one of the strongest agencies of the church. He referred to religion only indirectly. Grace was again impressed by his sincerity; and he was tactful and gracious in his effort to put the visitors at ease. He would not linger, he said, as a reminder that they were in a church; the evening was theirs and he wanted the club to manage its own affairs and define its own policy to meet the tastes and needs of the members. No one of any shade of religious faith could have taken offense from anything he said or feared that the pastor wished to use the club for proselyting purposes. However, when he had left, Ethel Durland extended an invitation to those present who were not already enrolled in the Sunday school to become affiliated, and urged attendance upon the regular church services.

"How tactless! Why couldn't she let well enough alone!" whispered Miss Reynolds to Grace. "Dr. Ridgely knows better than that."

"My sister has a strong sense of duty," Grace answered. "She couldn't bear to let the opportunity go by."

"She might have waited at least till they'd got their refreshments," Miss Reynolds retorted.

A young lady elocutionist who had volunteered her services recited a number of poems after Ethel had prepared the way with a few words on the new movement in poetry. The audience manifested no great interest in the movement and seemed utterly mystified by the poems offered. However, Ethel now announced

that the formal exercises were concluded and that they would repair to the basement where there would be dancing. Ethel, who did not dance herself and thought it a wicked form of amusement, had yielded reluctantly to the suggestion of the other members of the committee that dancing be included in the programme. Dr. Ridgely had given his approval on the ground that young people were bound to dance somewhere and as there was so much criticism of the prevailing fashion in dancing he thought it highly desirable to provide the amusement under auspices calculated to discourage the objectionable features complained of in the public dance halls.

"Well, where are all the young men?" inquired Miss Reynolds as she stood beside Grace in the basement. "Those four Servians look frightened to death and girls don't enjoy dancing with each other. If the church is going to do this thing, why don't they do it right? You'd think the committee would have got some young men here if they'd had to ask the police to drag them in."

The music was provided by two negroes, one of whom played the piano and the other the drum. As Twentieth Century dance music it was not of a high order. The musicians, duly admonished by the Chairman of the entertainment committee, were subduing their performance in the attempt to adjust it to the unfamiliar and sobering environment. And the room itself was not a particularly inspiring place for social entertaining. A map of the Holy Land and several enlarged photographs of early members of the church were the only adornments of the plaster wall, and the chairs were of that unsteady, collapsible type that suggest funerals and give the sitter a feeling of un-

dergoing penance for grievous sins. The low ceiling was supported by iron pillars that added nothing to the pleasure of dancing.

A number of girls began dancing together and after some persuasion Grace succeeded in getting the four couples of Servians on the floor. The young men danced with something of a ceremonial air as though, finding themselves in an alien atmosphere, they wished fitly to represent the dignity and pride of their race. Grace picked out several young girls who were huddled helplessly in a corner and danced with them and then seized upon the young men and introduced them in the hope of breaking the racial deadlock. The young fellows proved to be painfully shy when confronted by the necessity of dancing with girls they had never seen before. Nevertheless Grace's efforts resulted in putting some life and animation into the party. It had been said of her in college that she had the knack of making things go and it struck her suddenly that something might be done to inject some spirit and novelty into the occasion by asking the Servians to give their folk dances. One of the Servian girls undertook to instruct the negroes in the rhythms required for the folk dances and the young woman's vivacity and the negroes' good natured eagerness to meet her wishes evoked much merriment. The dances were given with spirit in a circle formed by the rest of the company, who warmly applauded the quaint performance.

"I always wanted to try these folk dances myself!" cried Grace appealing to the tallest of the young men. "Won't you teach me?"

He would be honored, he said, and the girl with whom he had been dancing went to the piano. Grace quickly proved herself an apt and enthusiastic pupil. When

she had learned the postures and steps of one of the group dances her instructor took her as his partner and she went through with it without an error. Others of the American girls now began trying the steps with the Servian young men and women, who entered zestfully into the work of teaching them. The result was the breaking down of restraint and by the time the refreshments were served the room presented a scene of gaiety and good fellowship.

"You have a genius for that kind of thing, my dear; you managed that beautifully," said Miss Reynolds to Grace as they assisted in pouring chocolate and passing sandwiches. "You saved the evening! Dear me! There's something wrong with this. As an effort to interest young people in the church this club can't say much for itself. Girls won't go where there are no young men; I imagine young men are not easy to lure into church parlors to hear poetry read to them, particularly poetry that doesn't mean anything. And this cellar and the piano and drum can't compete with a big dance hall and a real jazz band. This has been going on about like this for several years, but without as many girls as came tonight. I don't know what could be done, but this doesn't seem worth while."

"I don't know the answer either," said Grace, who, more or less consciously, was observing this attempt to do something for working girls with reference to her own problems. Her reading had made her familiar with the efforts of church organizations to meet the social needs of the changing times. It seemed to her that these all presupposed a degree of aspiration in the class sought to be helped. And knowing herself to have enjoyed probably the best opportunities as to education of any girl in the room she was troubled, knowing how feeble was her hold on such ideals of

conduct as only a little while ago she had believed herself to possess.

"Maybe," said Miss Reynolds, those people are right who say we're running too much to organizations. We start a club like this and stick it in a church basement and are terribly pleased with ourselves. These girls are all good girls; naughty girls wouldn't come; they can have a better time somewhere else. And they're just the ones we've got to reach. Am I right about that?"

"I think you are," replied Grace, wondering what Miss Reynolds would say if she could read her thoughts. To drop Trenton while it was still possible would make it necessary to reconcile herself to the acceptance of just such pleasures as Ethel thought sufficient social stimulus for girls who worked for a living.

"Why don't the church members come to these meetings?" Miss Reynolds demanded, "or send their sons and daughters? The minister of this church has sense and I'll wager he sees that side of it. A miserable thing like this only strengthens class feeling. I don't believe there's any way of making such a club go. The church is put in the position of tagging the rich and the poor so nobody can mistake one for the other. I think I'll spend my time and money on individual cases—find a few young people who really need help and concentrate on them!"

At eleven o'clock the musicians left and the entertainment came to an end.

"I'm so grateful to you, Grace, for helping; this is the best meeting we've ever had," said Ethel after she had pressed a folder describing the church's activities upon the last of the company. "Don't you think our work well worth while, Miss Reynolds?"

"I was greatly interested," Miss Reynolds replied evasively.

She took Grace and Ethel home in her car but did not encourage Ethel's attempt to discuss the evening. However, in bidding Ethel good-night she said she would send her a check for one hundred dollars for the girls' club.

"Your work is important, Miss Durland; I sympathize with the purpose; but I don't think you've got quite the right plan. But I confess that I have no suggestion worth offering. I realize that it's not easy to solve these problems."

VI

Grace was not happy! Much as she tried to avoid the flat conclusion, the best she could do was to twist it into a question. Love was a worthless thing if its effect was merely to torture, to inflict pain. She had told Trenton that she loved him and had virtually agreed to accept him on his own terms. Why, as the days passed, was she still doubting, questioning, challenging her love for him?

At the end of a rainy day that had been full of exasperations Grace left the store to take the trolley home. The rain had turned to sleet that beat spitefully upon her umbrella and the sidewalks were a mass of slush. She was dreading the passage home in the crowded car and the evening spent in her room, thinking of Trenton, fashioning her daily letter. She had begun to hate her room where every object seemed to be an animate, malevolent embodiment of some evil thought. She had half decided to persuade her father to brave the weather and return down town

after supper to go to a picture show when, turning the corner, she heard her name called.

"Hello, there, Grace!"

"Why, Bob, is it you?" she cried peering out at Cummings from under her umbrella.

He took her umbrella and fell into step with her.

"Don't look so scared; of course it's I. Frankly this isn't just chance alone; I've been lying in ambush!"

"This will never do!" she cried, but in spite of herself she was unable to throw any resentment into her tone.

"I've got a grand idea!" he said. "I'm playing hooky tonight. Evelyn called me up this afternoon to ask if I'd go to dine with an uncle of hers who's having a birthday. These family parties are bad enough at Christmas and Thanksgiving but when they begin ringing in birthdays I buck. So I told Evelyn I was too tired to go and that I had a business engagement anyhow, and would get my dinner down town."

"Do you realize that I'm getting wet? You beat it for your family party; I'm going home."

"Please, Grace, don't desert me!" he replied coaxingly. "Let's have a cozy supper together and I'll get you home early."

"I told you I'd never see you again!" she said indignantly. "You have no excuse for waylaying me like this. It's unpardonable!"

"Don't be so cruel!" he pleaded. "I'll be awfully nice—honestly I will! You won't have a thing to be sorry for."

Firm as her resolution had been not to see him again she was weighing the relief it would be to avoid going home against the danger of encouraging him.

"Where are your manners, sir? You haven't even offered to drive me home."

"God pity us homeless children in the great city tonight!" he cried, aware that she was relenting. "My car's parked yonder by the Sycamore Tavern. The night invites the adventurous spirit. We'll dare the elements and ride hard and fast like king's messengers."

"Will you keep that up—just that way—pretending we're two kids cutting up, as we used to do?"

"Of course, Grace; you may count on it."

"Well, I'm tired and bored with myself, and was dreading the ride home—I'll go! But whither?"

"To McGovern's house of refreshment at the border of a greenwood, known to Robin Hood in olden times!" cried Cummings, elated by her consent. "We'll stop at the Sycamore and I'll telephone the varlet to make the coffee hot."

"I supped there once, years agone! But the crowd was large and boisterous," she replied, now entering fully into the spirit of the proposed adventure. Their attempt at archaic speech recalled their youthful delight in the Arthurian legends in days when their world was enfolded in a golden haze of romance.

It was impossible to think of Cummings otherwise than as a boy, and a foolish boy, but amusing when the humor was on him as now, and to have supper with him would work injury to no one.

While he talked to McGovern she went into a booth and explained to her mother that she wouldn't be home for supper, saying that she was going to a movie with a girl friend.

"All set?" asked Cummings. "That's fine. We'll move right along. You'll be in early; that's a cinch. Evelyn's sure to be home by ten and I'll be practising

Chopin furiously when she gets back from her uncle's. Mac wasn't keen about taking us in as he shuts down at the first frost. But that's all the better; nobody else would think of going there on such a night!"

They were planning with much absurd detail the strategy of their approach to a beleagured capital when they reached McGovern's and were warmly welcomed by the proprietor.

"It gets mighty lonesome out here in the winter," he said. "The missus thought you'd like having supper right here in the living room so you could sort o' chum with the fire."

"That's a heavenly idea," said Grace, eyeing the table with covers laid for two. Mrs. McGovern, a stout woman whose face shone with good nature, appeared and bade her husband help bring in the dishes. Whereupon Cummings and Grace rushed to the kitchen to assist and filed in behind him, bearing serving dishes and singing a song they had learned in their childhood:

It's over the river to feed the sheep,
It's over the river to Charlie;
It's over the river to feed the sheep
And measure out the barley!"

VII

The wind whined in the chimney and somewhere a shutter banged spitefully.

"That's the only touch we needed to make a perfect evening!" said Grace, her cheeks glowing. "I expect to hear a stage coach come tearing into the yard any minute pursued by highwaymen. How did you ever come to think of McGovern's?"

"Just one of my little happy thoughts! Now that we've found the way there's no reason why we can't repeat," said Cummings.

"There you go! This doesn't establish a precedent; it belongs to those experiences it's better never to try again. But, it's certainly jolly so far as we've gone. What if somebody should come prancing in?"

"It's not a good night for prancing. McGovern said there hadn't been a soul here for a week. That's why he let us come, I suppose."

"I can think of certain persons who wouldn't add much to the joy of this particular party," said Grace musingly.

"A little danger adds to the fun! You seem to forget that I thought it all up; I'm ready to go right on round the world!"

"Yes, you are!" she retorted teasingly. "It sounds awful but sometimes I think it's cowardice that keeps most of us good! If you were a philosopher I'd ask your opinion on that subject but I see you haven't a ghost of an idea!"

He frowned. There had always been a serious side to Grace. In her high school days she was constantly dipping into books that were beyond her, treatises on social science and the like that only depressed him. He didn't know, of course, how eagerly she had caught at the opportunity of spending the evening with him merely to enjoy a few hours freedom from the turmoil of her own soul. It interested her for a moment to sound him as to whether by any chance he was conscious of the general transformation of things or knew that their visit to McGovern's in itself had a significance; but he was a dreamer who responded only to the harmonies of life and avoided all its discords. He was caught up in the whirligig of apparently changing

conditions just as she knew herself to be. Were they really breaking down the old barriers? Or was the world, aided by gasoline and jazz, moving so rapidly that in the mad rush it required a more alert eye to discern the danger signs?

The fact that she was eating supper with another woman's husband in a place frankly chosen for its isolation interested her, as so many social phenomena had interested her since she left the University.

"Oh, thunder!" he said with a shrug. "There's no use in our worrying. Let the old folks do that. I guess we've all got a right to be happy and tastes differ as to what happiness is. That's all."

This, of course, wasn't all, but she refrained from saying so. A look came into his eyes that warned her to have a care. She must guard herself from an attempt on his part, which she saw was impending, to take advantage of the hour to make love to her.

"Grace," he resumed, "every time I get blue it's you I want to see."

"Tush, tush! I'd never have come if I'd thought you were going to be foolish. Don't you get the notion into your silly head that you can run to me every time you get down in the mouth. There's no reason why I should hold your hand when you're sorrowful; I don't want the job!"

She was eating with an honest appetite that discouraged his hope of interesting her in sentiment.

"Wow! I thought you'd jump at the offer!"

"Have another biscuit! I want to laugh! How silly this is, Bob! I supposed you brought me out here to show me a good time and we're almost at the point of quarreling."

"Now, Grace, we'll never do that! I didn't think

you'd mind the compliment! But," dolefully, "I suppose you get so many!"

He became tractable, obedient, anxious to please her. She knew that she could do with him very much as she pleased; but there was no satisfaction in the exercise of her power over so unstable a character. She was sorry for him, much as she would have been sorry for a child who never quite learned his lessons; and there were lessons Bob Cummings would never learn.

After they had eaten their dessert they started the victrola and danced, and Bob was again the good playfellow. They began burlesquing classic dances, and laughed so boisterously at their success in making themselves ridiculous that McGovern and his wife came in to watch them. They had brought themselves to a high pitch of merriment when McGovern, who was assisting his wife in clearing the table, darted across the room and stopped the music.

"Good Lord; it's some one knocking!" cried Bob, as the outer door shook under a heavy thumping.

"Just keep quiet," said McGovern. "I guess it's some one who's got into trouble on the road."

"People stop for a little gas to help 'em out sometimes," said Mrs. McGovern. "Mac'll get rid of 'em."

McGovern, with his shoulder against the door threw a look of inquiry at Cummings and Grace. Cummings lifted his head as the voice again demanded admittance.

"Sounds like Atwood,—a chap I know," he said to Grace. "Who's with him, Mac?"

As McGovern opened the door a few grudging inches a male voice called him by name.

"Let us in, Mac: we're freezing to death!"

"Sorry, but we're closed for the season," McGovern answered.

"That doesn't go, Mac! You can't turn *me* down," replied the voice.

Before McGovern could answer a vigorous pressure flung the door open and a young man stepped in followed by a young woman in a fur coat and smart toque.

"Never thought you'd shut the door in my face, Mac!" said the young man reproachfully. "We've got to have some coffee and sandwiches. Hello, Mrs. Mac: how's everything?"

The young woman, blinking in the light, was walking toward the fireplace when she became aware that McGovern and his wife had been entertaining other guests. She paused and stared, her gaze passing slowly from Cummings to Grace. Her companion, finding that McGovern and his wife were receiving coldly his voluble expressions of regard, now first caught sight of the two figures across the room.

"Hello-o-o!" he exclaimed. "Look who's here!"

"Why, Jimmie, is that you?" said Cummings with a gulp.

"I call it some night! And Mac, the old pirate, didn't want to let me in!"

The McGoverns were hastily retiring toward the kitchen, Mac tiptoeing as though leaving a death chamber. The weight of his grievous error was upon him; never before had he precipitated a wife upon a husband in so disturbing a fashion.

Grace was watching the young woman, who pulled a chair away from the table that still bore evidences of the recent repast and sank into it. She was tall and

slender and the light struck gold in her hair. Feeling perhaps that Grace's eyes were upon her, she bent and plucked a raveling, real or imaginary, from the skirt of her coat. She unbottoned her coat and drew off her gloves with elaborate care.

Her companion stood with his hands thrust into the pockets of his overcoat, grinning. An old-fashioned clock on the mantel began to strike to the accompaniment of queer raspings of its mechanism. The hands indicated the hour as ten but in the manner of its kind the hammer within pounded out twelve. There was a suggestion of insolence in the protracted thumping of the bell. As the last torturing sound was dying Grace turned her head slightly to look at Cummings, who was staring blankly at the lady in the fur coat.

"What a funny clock!" Atwood remarked with the jubliant tone of one who has made a discovery of great value to mankind.

"It's a dreadful liar!" said Grace.

"My grandfather used to have one just like it, with a basket of fruit painted on the door," said Atwood, advancing toward Grace, beaming with gratitude for her response to his attempt to promote conversation. He was short, plump and blond, with thin fair hair already menaced by baldness. He was not far advanced in the twenties and looked very much like an overgrown school boy. Grace appraised him as a person of kindly impulses and possibly not wholly without common sense.

Having planted himself beside Grace he remarked further upon clocks and their general unreliability, while he rolled his eyes first toward Cummings and then in the direction of the lady in the fur coat. Grace had already assumed without the aid of this telegraphy that the lady was Bob's wife. Atwood seemed to be

appealing to Grace to assist him in terminating a situation that was verging upon the intolerable, but she was unable to see that it was incumbent upon her to take the initiative. But Mrs. Cummings might sit there forever unless something happened. Bob continued to wear the look of one condemned and awaiting the pleasure of the executioner. Grace felt strongly moved to walk up to him and shake him. She had read of such unfortunate meetings between husband and wife and they were usually attended with furious denunciations and sometimes with pistols. Without the sustaining presence of Atwood she would have retired to the domestic end of the McGovern establishment and waited for the storm to blow over, but the storm, if such impended, was slow in developing.

"This can't last forever," said Grace in a low tone.

" If *something* doesn't happen in a minute I'm a dead man," Atwood whispered.

"I think it would be nice if we all got acquainted. I'm Miss Durland, Mr. Atwood," said Grace in a tone audible throughout the room.

"Thank you so much! I was just dying to know your name!" he declared fervidly. "Oh, Evelyn——"

Evelyn lifted her head and looked at him defiantly, but he squared himself and said:

"Mrs. Cummings, Miss Durland. I really supposed you had met before."

His voice rose to an absurd squeak as he expressed this last hopeful sentiment.

Evelyn bit her lip and nodded, a nod that might have been intended for Grace or quite as definitely for an enlarged photograph of an ancestral whiskered McGovern in a gilt frame that adorned the wall behind her.

Grace glanced at Bob, still rooted to the floor, and he remarked with badly-feigned cheerfulness.

"Well, I suppose we might as well go home—" a suggestion not without ambiguity, as there were four persons in the room and two at least, having just arrived and awaiting refreshments, might be assumed to prefer to linger.

"Not just yet!" said Grace, walking slowly toward Evelyn. "There's something I'd like to say to Mrs. Cummings."

"Oh, *really*——"

"We're going in a minute," interposed Cummings, with sudden animation. "I think maybe, Grace——"

"Grace!" Evelyn repeated scornfully. "I'm going home. Jimmy, I want you to take me home."

"Yes, Evelyn; of course we'll go whenever you like," said Atwood. "But, we ought to explain things a little. I mean you and I ought to explain them," he elaborated as he saw her lips tighten. "I wouldn't want Bob to think——"

"I don't care what Bob thinks!" she flared. "He lied to me; he told me he had a business engagement, to get out of taking me to Uncle Fred's! And this was the engagement!"

"But everything's going to be explained," Atwood persisted. "You know there's always an explanation for everything, and Bob's the best fellow in the world —you know that Evelyn."

"I know nothing of the kind! I'll let him know at the proper time and place what I think of him."

"Well, of course, Evelyn," said Atwood with his odd little pipe of a laugh. But he was very earnest; he brought Cummings to his side by an imperious gesture. As the man for the hour he was not acquitting himself so badly; he looked at Grace for her approval, wasn't sure that she gave it, but with his hand resting on Cummings's shoulder, he spoke directly to the point.

"I'm awfully sorry about this, Bob. You know I'm in and out of your house a lot and you never seem to mind. And tonight I tried to get you on the telephone to see if we could do something, the three of us I mean, —run down to see a picture or any old thing—and the maid said you were at Colonel Felton's; both of you, I thought she meant. And I called up there about the time I thought the party would be over and found you weren't there and asked Evelyn to let me come for her. And I thought it would be good fun to take a little dash through the storm and I knew you wouldn't care. There couldn't be any harm in that; we've all been out here together lots of times."

"Why, that's perfectly all right, Jimmie!" exclaimed Cummings with a flourish of magnanimity which did not, however, awaken the grateful response he may have expected from Evelyn, who had murmured an indifferent, "Thank you, Jimmie," when Atwood concluded.

"There's nothing tragic about this," Cummings began a little defiantly. "Miss Durland and I have known each other all our lives. She's an old friend. "She came out with me just as a lark; just as you and Jimmie came. I don't want you to think——"

"That will do!" said Evelyn rising so suddenly that Cummings backed away from her in alarm. "Anything you have to say to me needn't be said before this old friend of yours."

"But, Evelyn, you're not fair!" cried Cummings hotly. "It isn't fair to Miss Durland. The whole fault of her being out here is mine. I'll not have you think——"

"You're terribly anxious about what I think!" Evelyn interrupted. "I'll think what I please!"

Grace, on her way to the sofa on which she had

left her coat and hat, swung round, her face aflame.

"It may not occur to you, Mrs. Cummings, that what you think isn't of the slightest importance."

"You act as though you thought it was!" Evelyn flung back.

"I'm not acting; you're doing enough of it!"

"You've probably had far more experience in such scenes!"

"With much better actors than your husband, I hope!"

"Humph! I don't believe we're going to like each other."

"The regret is not mine, I assure you!"

Grace turned to a mirror to straighten her hat. Her preparations for departure were provocative of thought in Atwood's mind. He expressed the thought immediately, evidently with the laudable hope of lessening the tension.

"Oh, Miss Durland, won't you let *me* take you home? I can run you into town without the slightest trouble."

Evelyn's surprise at this suggestion betrayed itself in a spurt of coffee that missed the cup she was filling and spread in an amber stain on the table cloth.

Grace was walking toward the veranda door drawing on her gloves.

"Thank you ever so much, Mr. Atwood," she said evenly. "But Mr. Cummings is going to take me home!"

Cummings glanced at his wife, uncertainty plainly written on his face.

"Why, yes—yes—" he mumbled.

"I'm waiting, Bob!" said Grace.

He gathered up his raincoat and cap. Grace waited for him to open the door for her.

"Good night, Mr. Atwood!" she flung over her shoulder, and the door closed.

"Well, there was that!" Cummings said after they were in the highway.

"I hope you're satisfied with yourself," said Grace angrily.

"Good Lord! Didn't I do the best I could about it?"

"You couldn't have done worse if you'd had a week to plan it! Instead of standing there like a fool when your wife came in, why didn't you walk right up to her like a man and introduce me? You were scared to death; you thought of nothing but how you were going to square yourself with her. You did everything you could to give her the idea that you were ashamed of me."

"Why, Grace, you can't mean this!" He slowed down the car the better to talk. "God knows I did the best I could. I couldn't help being surprised when they came in. And you never can tell how Evelyn's going to take anything."

"Oh, yes; it was Evelyn you were troubled about; you weren't at all worried about me! When you came out of your trance and tried to explain how I came to be there the mischief was already done. Of course she wouldn't listen to you then. You certainly made a mess of it."

"I don't understand you at all! I swear I did the best I could."

"Well, it was a pretty poor best! Please mind what you're doing; you're still so nervous you'll land in the ditch in a minute."

Thus admonished he steadied himself at the wheel. Her anger had expended itself and she was now silently staring ahead at the snow covered road.

No word had passed between them for several minutes and Grace, absorbed in her own thoughts, was hoping that he wouldn't attempt to discuss the matter further. Her respect for him was gone; she disliked him cordially, seeing him only as a timid, evasive person whose primary impulse was self-protection. He might play on the wrong side of a forbidden wall but the moment he was discovered he would scramble for safe territory.

He touched her hand so suddenly that she started and snatched it away with a feeling of aversion.

"We've both been thinking about what happened back there," he began. "I don't know just where it leaves me; I don't know how Evelyn is going to take it."

He paused, bending forward while he waited for some encouragement to go on.

"I don't care how Evelyn is going to take it! I thought I'd made it clear that I didn't want to talk of your private affairs any more. They don't interest me in the least."

"Of course if Evelyn wants a row——"

"Oh, Bob! *Please,* be quiet!"

"But I can't leave it this way! You've meant too much to me for us to part like this. What I was going to say was—is——"

She sighed despairingly and resettled herself in her place.

"What I want you to know is that I care a lot for you, Grace—and if there's a row—if we break up, Evelyn and I, I mean——"

"I think you've lost your mind!" she cried furiously.

"But, you don't see—you don't understand——"

"Oh, but I do! If Evelyn turns you out you think

maybe you'd like to give *me* a trial! That's certainly an idea! I suppose you have visions of me figuring in your divorce suit—Cummings against Cummings! I don't believe you used to be like this. It's astonishing how you've deteriorated!"

"I didn't expect this from you, Grace!" he replied bitterly. "I've felt that I could always count on you to——"

The engine began to cough peevishly and he stopped to investigate.

"Here's luck!" he exclaimed spitefully as he got back into the car. "Just about enough gas to pull us to that garage half a mile ahead. I guess somebody's pinned a jinx on the evening!"

"I'll wait outside," she said when the car had been coaxed to the garage.

"Only a minute, Grace. I'm awfully sorry."

As she stood on the cement driveway the whistle followed by a flash of the headlight of an incoming interurban car on the track that ran parallel with the highway caught her attention. Across the road several people were waiting on the platform and she resolved to board the car if it stopped before Cummings reappeared. She was in a humor to annoy him if she could and as the car slowed down she began to walk slowly toward the platform and then with a glance over her shoulder ran and swung herself aboard. As the car got under way she caught a glimpse of the roadster as Cummings backed it out. She derived no small degree of satisfaction from the reflection that her departure in this fashion expressed her scorn of him more effectually than anything she could have said.

She left the car at the interurban station and walked home. Her knowledge of life was broadening and

that too in divisions of the Great Curriculum of whose very existence she had had only the haziest consciousness. Her freedom, the independence she so greatly prized, was not without its perils. Her thoughts took a high range; she wondered whether after all the individual could, without incurring serious hazards, ignore the warnings and safeguards established for the protection of society.

She wanted to laugh over the encounter at McGovern's, but in the quiet street it was not so easy to laugh at it. What society had done to educate her, to fortify and strengthen her for the battle of life—a phrase she detested from her mother's frequent use of it—counted for naught. She was alarmed to find that she never really reached any conclusion in attempting to settle her problems. When she thought she had determined any of the matters that rose with so malevolent an insistence for decision some unexpected turn left her still beset by uncertainties.

Two policemen standing on a corner stopped talking as she passed and she felt their eyes following her. They symbolized the power of the law; they were agents of society, they were representatives of the order of things against which she had been trying to persuade herself she was in rebellion. She now seriously questioned the desirability of being a rebel; such a status had its disagreeable and uncomfortable side.

When she reached her room she sat down thinking she would write her usual daily letter to Trenton; but with paper before her and a pen in her hand she was unable to bring herself to it. The disturbance at McGovern's had shaken her more than she liked to believe.

In her cogitations, as she lay in the dark unable to sleep, she wondered whether the incident at McGovern's might not be a warning, which she would do well to heed, to discourage Trenton's further attentions. Trenton might in a similar circumstances behave no better than Bob had behaved and she was not anxious to subject herself to the ire of another indignant wife.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

GRACE was keenly disappointed at receiving no letter from Trenton the next day. She canvassed all possible explanations of this first lapse in their correspondence. Whatever might be the cause she decided not to write until she heard from him again. She passed an unhappy morning and was relieved when Irene asked her to go to lunch. It was possible that Irene might have some news of Trenton, as he and Kemp were constantly in touch with each other.

"Tell me I look perfectly all right—just as though nothing had happened," Irene remarked when they had given their order.

"Well, if you want to know, you're just a trifle paler than usual; but I'd never have noticed it. What's the trouble?"

Irene answered by holding out her left hand.

"The emerald is no more! Oh, I haven't sent it back! I've just stuck it down in the bottom of a drawer with a lot of other old junk. It's all over, my dear."

"You and Tommy have quit!" Grace exclaimed.

"Finished, quit—whatever you like. You'll remember I told you such things can't last. Please don't think I wasn't prepared! But to a certain extent Tommy did fool me. I thought he really cared for me and I won't deny that I thought a lot of him."

"This is certainly a surprise," Grace remarked, not-

ing signs of dejection in the usually placid Irene that had previously escaped her.

"Well, I got a line on him a few days ago. It's a small world and things have a way of getting round."

Irene spoke as one whose philosophy is quite equal to any demand that may be made upon it. She dilated upon the general perfidy of man as though her personal disappointment was negligible and only to be mentioned for purposes of illustration. She continued in this vein so long that Grace began to fear she was not to learn just what had happened to shatter Irene's faith in Kemp.

"Let's consider all the male species dead and buried! I'm dying of curiosity. Just what happened to you and Tommy?"

"He lied to me, that's all; and I found him out."

"That's too bad; I'm ever so sorry," Grace replied, not knowing whether Irene sought consolation for the loss of her lover or wanted to be congratulated on her prescience in foreseeing the inevitable end of the affair.

"Oh, it's all right with me! But I can't deny that when it came it was a jar. You see Tommy's mighty good fun and awfully clever. I learned a lot from Tommy; he used to tell me everything. I'll wager he's sorry now he told me a lot of most intimate things, about people and business and even his family affairs; but they're safe, I'd never betray his confidence even if he has gone back on me."

"Of course not; you'd never do that," Grace assented, and saw that Irene was pleased by this testimony to her high-mindedness. "Maybe there's some mistake about it. Of course you'll give Tommy a chance to explain."

"Oh, I gave him the chance all right enough. It

was over the telephone and, my dear, you should have heard him gasp when I put it up to him!"

"Go on and tell me what Tommy did or let's stop talking about it!"

"I'm going to tell you. You and Minnie Lawton are the only people I *could* tell. I've been meeting Tommy at Minnie's apartment and she has to know why I'm not going there any more. Tommy's always told me I was the only one—that old, old story! Well, a certain person—he didn't know I knew Tommy—was asking me about him the other day. He said he'd seen Tommy in Chicago with a very nifty girl he seemed to be chummy with. He saw them together last Saturday night. Now, Tommy had a date with me for Saturday evening but he told me Friday he was going to Chicago unexpectedly with his wife for the opera. He didn't take his wife to Chicago—I easily found that out. Tommy went to Chi all right enough but not to hear Mary Garden. So, there's the end of our little romance."

"What did Tommy have to say for himself?"

"What *could* he say!" Irene exclaimed disdainfully. "He wanted to see me of course; said he could explain everything, but I said good-bye very sweetly and hung up on him. I'd like to see him explain a thing like that! I suppose he thought he'd send me a box of candy and everything would be lovely. I'm a good deal of a fool, my dear, but hardly to that extent."

"I shouldn't just pick you out to try putting anything over on."

"They're all alike!" Irene resumed, ignoring Grace's tribute to her perspicacity. "Men expect women to take everything. Poor Tommy! If he doesn't stop drinking he's going to die real quick one of these days.

I guess he didn't like my lecturing him so much. You know I was interested in all his plans—he's no end ambitious and he used to invite my little hints and suggestions; not that I really know about machinery or finance, but I suppose I have got a business head."

"You certainly have, Irene. You'll have a big business of your own some day or a wonderful position in New York. You could easily swing our department now."

"I suppose I might, but I've almost decided to get married. Oh, don't jump! I mean when I see a good chance. Now that I'm done with Tommy the idea doesn't seem so bad. Perhaps," she added, "perhaps we're not fair to marriage! There may be something in it after all."

"There are still people who think so," said Grace, impelled to laughter by Irene's gravity.

"Oh, I suppose we've got to recognize it! How's Ward these days? Still roaming the world?"

"In New York the last I heard of him, and terribly busy."

"Do you know, there's something pathetic about Ward Trenton," said Irene. "There's something away back in his mind that he tries to hide even from himself! You know what I mean? It's his wife, I suppose. I saw her picture in a magazine not so long ago and meant to show it to you. She's not at all the frump you'd expect from her being an author and lecturer, but quite handsome and smartly got up. It's certainly queer that a woman like that who has scads of money and a real man for a husband won't stay at her own fireside, but has to trot around showing herself off. And Ward's fascinating; those quiet self-contained men are always fascinating. And they certainly keep you guessing as to what they think.

Take poor Tommy; once he's away from business he's got to be amused. But Ward's different. That man does a lot of solid thinking even when he's out to play."

"He's kind, he's awfully kind," Grace murmured.

With the Cummings's episode and its very obvious lesson still playing through her thoughts Grace eagerly welcomed Irene's praise of Trenton, feeling the need of just the assurances her friend was giving her as to his fine qualities, which attained a new dignity in view of Kemp's inconstancy.

"Ward's perfectly splendid," Irene continued as though fearing she hadn't done Trenton full justice. "I've never had any illusions about Tommy; I always knew I'd have to pass him up some day. But don't let me shake your faith in dear old Ward. He won't lie to you; he'd tell the truth if it ruined him."

"You really think that?" asked Grace with a slight quaver in her voice which the watchful Irene did not miss.

"Of course I think it! But with two people as intense in your different ways as you and Ward, you're likely to hurt each other terribly. I've been awfully careful what I've said to you, Grace, about—well—about going the limit with Ward. But I can see you're not just throwing yourself at his head. And Ward, if I know him, is not going to expect you to."

"Oh, he's fine!" said Grace, averting her eyes. "No one could be finer, but——"

"Yes, my dear; there's that *but* we always bring up against! I won't say a word about Tommy and me. Of course I never loved Tommy but I thought he was a good fellow and on the level; and it was exciting while it lasted. That's what catches a lot of girls who go in for such little affairs as mine with Tommy. It's

the excitement of doing something they know's dead wrong and bound to end in a smash-up."

As Grace was eating little and seemed dispirited, Irene recurred to Trenton.

"Ward would never be satisfied just to play around with a girl, knowing that whenever he got tired he'd chuck her and pick up another. I'm saying this because I know he fell for you hard that very first night you met; it was a clear case of love at first sight with you two. I'm not just kidding you; you know as well as I do you're different from other girls. You've got brains and poise. Not that you weren't always a lot of fun and a good pal,—I never knew a girl who was as much fun to play with. But you've always kept your self-respect and held your head high. Ward likes that in you because he's that sort himself."

"I wish I could believe you're right but, Irene, sometimes I don't feel I know myself at all! When I quit college I was full of self-conceit and thought I had a strong grip on myself. I was going to test out life—find out everything in my own way. But there are times when I get scared. I thought it would be fun to drift along for awhile, just trying myself out and I was sure I could stop whenever I pleased and settle on something. But I'm not doing it! What's the matter with me anyhow?" she demanded mournfully.

"You're in love! Don't you think I haven't been watching the awful symptoms. You've got a real case!"

"Do you really mean that? Would you really know?" asked Grace eagerly.

"Would I know? I could see it with my eyes shut. And I can see it's troubling you. These are things we've all got to settle for ourselves, my dear. And from what I know of Ward I'll wager he's taking it

just as hard as you are. He's married and he knows just what the whole thing means. I'd be disappointed in him if he didn't give you a good chance to drop him now even though he suffered terribly. And he's of the kind who do suffer all right."

"It might be better," said Grace soberly, "if I didn't see him again!"

"You're going to be unhappy if you do that. You'd both be unhappy. Of course, there's his wife. He'd be likely to think of her pride and dignity,—chivalry and all that sort of stuff. And if he got a divorce and married you the whole business might be unpleasant. You're not the sort of girl who could go through a thing like that without suffering terribly. It's something for you to think about, my dear!"

In spite of her trouble with Kemp, Irene was eating a substantial luncheon. There were times when Grace felt an aversion for Irene. The most sacred relationships of life the girl treated with a cold cynicism that affected Grace disagreeably. She was pondering the sordidness of Irene's liason with Kemp. The lofty condescension with which Irene spoke of him amused Grace only mildly.

"Wouldn't it be grand," Irene continued, "to be made love to—I mean by some one who really knew how! Somebody who'd approach you as though you were a queen and stand in terrible awe of you! The trouble with all us women nowadays is that we're too easy. The next time a man shows any symptoms of being interested in me I'm going to be the coy little girl, I can tell you! Oh, I'm not thinking of Tommy"—her lip curled—"I mean where the man really respects you first of all. I tell you, Grace, I'm pretty well fed up on this new woman stuff. Believe me, I'm staying home with mother these nights knitting a sweater for father, and Sunday I'm going to

put on a big apron and bake a cake—honest, I am! Women do better as a domestic animal like the common or fireside cat."

"You don't really think that!" Grace exclaimed.

"Oh, I know Grace, you're all for our glorious independence and fighting in the ranks shoulder to shoulder with the men. But the trouble is we can't fight *with* them; we're fighting against them every hour of the day! My dear, there's a curse on us—the curse of sex! There's absolutely no ducking it. You may talk all you like about equality and how men and women meet in business and the woman is the equal of the man. All right! She may have just as good a head as the man she's dealing with but if she still has home-grown teeth and her face isn't painful to look at sex is all mixed up in the figures. You can't get away from it."

"But, Irene——!"

"Oh, I saw you sell a woman a coat yesterday—that old girl from up in the bushes whose husband came along to keep her from blowing his bank roll, and it was the man you sold that rag to, not the woman. Sex! You're a pretty girl, you know, and he spent twice what he'd let her blow on herself if it hadn't been for your blandishments. And when I go down to New York on a buying jaunt the polite gentlemen in our line buy me expensive dinners and take me in swift taxies to the theatre and to supper and to snappy dance places afterwards. That's sex! If the store sends a *man* down there the same birds buy him a quick lunch and that's all. But a woman's different! Sex, my dear, sex!"

"Oh, it's not as bad as that!" Grace protested. "I want to be considered as a human being first and as a woman afterwards. I don't mind saying that there have been times lately when I've wished I could

see things as mother does, but I can't. There's no use trying to live backwards. I just couldn't stay in a house all the time and cook and sew and darn for a husband; I'd go crazy!"

"Well, the home life listens good to me right now!" replied Irene with a sigh. "No; this is my turn to pay the check. By the way, did you notice that woman I waited on this morning—the dish-face with too much paint and pearl earrings as big as your fist—well," she broke off abruptly—"here's a happy surprise! If I'm not mistaken here's the tall sycamore of Raccoon Creek!"

"What on earth are you talking about—a raccoon with pearl earrings?"

"No; a certain party just coming in the door. Looks like your old college chum who took you to the football game."

Grace turned to find John Moore bearing down upon their table.

"You *will* excuse me, won't you?" he exclaimed radiantly as he shook hands. "Oh, I remember Miss Kirby; ashamed of myself if I didn't. Well, Grace, they told me you were up here at lunch so I thought I'd take a chance. Hope you've got a minute. I came to town on particular business. Sold an Airedale pup and brought him up to make special delivery."

"You have a kennel, Mr. Moore?" asked Irene. "I adore Airedales."

"I'll say it's a kennel!" John answered as he drew a chair from an adjoining table and seated himself. "Grace knows the place; an old barn, one of the professors let's me use for taking care of his furnace. I'm selling off my pups now before I move to the great city. I'll be lonesome without a dog when I come up after Christmas. When I went West last

summer as an honest farm hand I had to leave my dogs for a darky to look after and I certainly did miss them. But I've got twenty-five dollars apiece for them," he concluded, with a frank appeal for their approval.

He gave Grace the latest news of the university, explaining his items for Irene's enlightenment. When Grace asked him about particular girls he protested that he had never heard of their existence. Grace was just kidding him, he said.

"The fact is, Miss Kirby, since Grace left the campus I haven't seen any girls."

"I can well believe it," Irene replied. "With Grace gone there's nothing left of the picture but the frame. She's one in a million. You'll look a long time before you find another girl like Grace Durland."

"You've said something!" John affirmed, and pretending that Grace was not present he and Irene engaged in a lively discussion of Grace's merits. With Irene this was of course only a device for flirting with John. John understood perfectly that she was flirting with him. As this went on John and Irene were taking careful note of each other. Two natures could not have been more truly antipodal. Grace was amused to see them at such pains to please each other. She interrupted them occasionally with a question as to some virtue attributed to her, which they feigned not to hear but answered indirectly.

He was already preparing for his removal to the city and wore a new suit and hat and carried a pair of tan gloves which obviously had not been worn. He struck his hat with them occasionally as he talked. John had always been quick to note little tricks of manner and speech and when they pleased him he

frankly adopted them. His manner of playing with his gloves was imitated from a young instructor at the university who carried gloves with him everywhere, even into the class room, where he played with them as he heard recitations. John in his new raiment looked less like a countryman than Grace had thought possible. She recalled what a cynical senior had once said of him—that above the collar he looked like a signer of the Declaration of Independence but that the rest of him was strongly suggestive of the barnyard. His eyes missed nothing; he was too eager to get ahead in the world not to study his own imperfections and overcome them. Having impressed John with the idea that for the few minutes they spent together he was the only specimen of the male species in the world, Irene languidly glanced at her watch.

"Only ten minutes to get back, Grace. I'll keep the wheels of commerce turning while you talk to Mr. Moore. Do forgive me, old things, for keeping you waiting."

As she gathered up her purse and vanity box Moore protested that he and Grace had nothing to say to each other which she might not hear.

"Oh, don't try that on me!" Irene replied, looking from one to the other meaningfully.

"If you leave us alone John will begin talking poetry," said Grace. "Please wait, I don't feel a bit like poetry today!"

"There, Miss Kirby; you see Grace doesn't want to be alone with me! I'll tell you what! I'm staying in town tonight and it would be fine if we could all go to a show together. There's a picture I've read about—'Mother Earth,' they call it; said to give a fine idea of pioneer life. I guess we owe it to the

folks who drove out the Indians and cleaned up the varmints to show 'em a little respect, and they say that picture's a humdinger. If you don't like the notion and there's some other show——"

His eyes were bright with expectancy as he awaited their decision.

"You see," he added with a broad smile, "now that I've sold my last pup and paid my debts I feel a little like celebrating."

"Thank you ever so much, Mr. Moore," said Irene, "but really, I——"

"Why, of course you can go, Irene," exclaimed Grace, who had not missed Irene's look of consternation when John suggested spending an evening viewing a movie illustrative of the sacrifices of the pioneers. However, Irene had quickly recovered from the shock and seemed to be seriously considering John's invitation.

"I'll be glad to go, thank you, John; but of course we must have Irene!"

"Certainly, we want Miss Kirby," John declared.

"But if you hadn't seen me here, Mr. Moore, you'd never have thought of asking me. You know you wouldn't."

"Honestly, I thought of it before I came into the store! Ever since that day you were so nice about letting Grace off to go to the game I've had a feeling I'd like to show you some trifling attention. I'll take it as another favor if you'll go."

"Oh, if you put it that way, Mr. Moore, of course I accept," said Irene. "I must skip; you stay, Grace, and arrange the little details."

"It's mighty nice of Miss Kirby to go," John remarked as he resumed his seat after bowing Irene from the table. "And it must make things a lot easier

for you to have a fine girl like that to work with. You can tell she knows her business. I guess nothing's going to rattle her much!"

"What are you trying to do, John; make me jealous?" laughed Grace.

"Now Grace, you know——"

What would John think, Grace wondered—John of the high ideals and aspirations, if he knew that it was only because Irene had broken with a man whose mistress she had been and in consequence was disposed to take refuge in things wholly foreign to her nature and experience, that she had accepted an invitation to attend a picture show that celebrated the joys and sorrows of the pioneers!

It was settled that John should go home with her for supper and that they would meet Irene in the lobby of the theatre. Grace took occasion to caution John against mentioning Irene at home. Her mother and Ethel didn't like Irene, she explained.

"I don't see but she's a pretty fine girl," John replied. "And it makes a hit with me that she's such a good friend of yours."

"Of course I'm not going," said Irene when Grace went back to her department. "I supposed you understood that."

"I certainly didn't. John wanted you or he wouldn't have asked you. You know what you were saying about sex! Here's a chance to prove you can forget it. Let's assume John's taking us to a movie merely because we're charming and amusing persons; just as he might take a couple of young men."

"Well I don't care anything about going to a show right now when I'm wearing mourning for myself, but I'd just like to sit near that suitor of yours for an hour or two. He does me good."

This was not like Irene, and Grace discounted heavily her friend's admiration for John. It was merely that Irene was contrasting John with Kemp, in much the same spirit that she had praised Trenton at the lunch table.

"If he knew me for what I am he'd probably run like a scared rabbit," said Irene, slipping a tape-line through her fingers. "I felt myself an awful fraud all the time I talked to him."

"You can always rely on John to think the best of everybody and everything," Grace replied. "He's a mighty satisfactory sort of person. If I ever got into trouble I know John would stand by me."

"I believe you're right," Irene returned. "A man with eyes like his is bound to be mighty square. But when I sat there kidding him about you I did feel awfully guilty and ashamed of myself. I was afraid those eyes might see too much!"

"Come out of the dark!" exclaimed Grace. "We'd better go to work. John's going home to supper with me and we'll meet you in the Pendennis lobby at a quarter before eight."

II

The afternoon passed and still no letter from Trenton. Grace was glad that she had not told Irene how far Trenton had gone in declaring himself. Not even Irene should know how much she cared for Trenton. She indulged in the luxury of self-pity, picturing herself going through life with the remembrance of him like a wound in her heart that would never heal. And after summoning her courage to meet such a situation she was swept with a great tenderness as she thought

of him, remembering the touch of his hand, his kiss on her lips.

When she called up her mother to say that she was bringing John home Mrs. Durland reminded her that this was the night Ethel had asked Mr. Haley to supper. Grace had been fully informed as to Mr. Haley's acceptance of Ethel's invitation but in her confused state of mind she had forgotten it. Haley was Ethel's discovery and Grace had several times encountered him in the Durland parlor. Recently Ethel had been referring to the young man a little self-consciously by his first name. Osgood Haley was twenty-seven, a well appearing young man, who was a city salesman for a wholesale grocery firm. Mrs. Durland had satisfied herself by inquiries of an acquaintance in the town in which Haley had originated that he was of good family and he was thereupon made to feel at home in the Durland household.

Ethel had met him in her Sunday school where within a few weeks after taking a class of boys he had doubled its membership. It was his personality, Ethel said; and beyond question Haley had a great deal of personality. Among other items of Haley's biography Ethel had acquainted the family with the fact that his interest in religion was due to the influence of a girl to whom he had been engaged but who died only a short time before the day appointed for their wedding. Ethel made a great deal of this. Haley's devotion to the memory of the girl he had loved was very beautiful as Ethel described it, and Mrs. Durland said that such devotion was rare in these times.

Haley had brought to perfection a manner that not only had proved its efficacy in selling groceries but was equally impressive in the parlor. When he shook a hand he clung to it while he smiled into the face of

its owner and uttered one of a number of cheerful remarks from a list with which he was fortified. These were applied with good judgment and went far toward convincing the person greeted that Mr. Haley was the possessor of some secret of happiness which he benevolently desired to communicate to all mankind.

Ethel having gone home early to prepare some special dishes for her guest, came in flushed from the kitchen just as Haley arrived with Grace and John, who had met him on the street car. Mr. Durland had meekly submitted to investiture in a white shirt in honor of the occasion. He had confused Haley with a young man from Rangerton who sometimes visited the family. When he had been set straight on this point they went to the table where the talk opened promisingly.

Haley needed no encouragement to talk; he was a born talker. He was abundantly supplied with anecdotes, drawn from his experience as a saleman, which proved that a cheery and optimistic spirit will overcome all obstacles. John provoked him to renewed efforts by insisting that theoretically the position of the pessimist is sound. Haley would have none of this. He had found, he declared, that hope is infectious and he derived the liveliest satisfaction from his success in overcoming the prejudice and reluctance of difficult customers.

"You two boys make a splendid team," remarked Mrs. Durland. "I suppose you don't know many people here, John."

"Only frat brothers and boys who've graduated from the University since I've been there. There's quite a bunch of them, too, for I've been plugging around the sacred groves of academe a long time."

"I suppose you'll be so busy when you move to town you'll have to limit your social life," said Ethel. "But we all need outside interests. Osgood has been here a year but it was some time before he found just what he needed."

Haley rose to this promptly by saying that being received in a home like the Durland's was the pleasantest thing that had ever happened to him.

"Oh course, John," Ethel continued, "you will find a church connection helpful. I hope you will hear Dr. Ridgley before handing in your letter anywhere else."

"By all means," said Haley. "I tried several churches before I finally settled on Dr. Ridgley's. He's helped me over a lot of hard places just by a word or two. It just occurs to me, Ethel, that John," (Haley was already calling Moore by his first name) "would enjoy Mr. Forman's bible class. They're all business and professional men and Mr. Forman is a thorough Bible student. If I didn't enjoy my boys so much I'd certainly never miss a Sunday morning with Mr. Forman."

"You see, John, we're trying to fix everything up for you," said Mrs. Durland, turning a sympathetic glance upon Moore.

Grace was unable to recall that she had ever heard John speak of churches, though in their walks about Bloomington he had discussed religion in general terms. She doubted whether, with his many engrossing employments, he had been a diligent church-goer.

"Don't let them crowd you, John," she said, seeing that he hesitated to commit himself.

"I'm not a church member," he said diffidently. "I suppose I'm hardly what you'd call a believer; at least I don't believe all you're supposed to believe if you

subscribe to a creed. I hope I'm not shocking you folks but it always seems to me there's something stifling about a church. When I was a boy on the home farm and all the neighbors met at the country church every Sunday, I always hated to go in; it seemed a lot cheerfuller outside. I suppose if I got right down to it I'd say I believe in a great power that I haven't any name for, that moves the world. It's bigger than any church, and it works in all of us whether we go to church or not. I suppose if you got down to bed rock you'd call me an agnostic. But I'm strong for whatever any church does to help people live right. When it comes to believing a lot of things I can't square with reason I just can't do it."

"That's about my own idea," ventured Mr. Durland, who had been bending over his plate with his usual stolid silence.

"We're not so far apart, John," said Mrs. Durland, anxious to avert the deliverance which she saw from the tense look in Ethel's face was imminent. "We all see things differently these days and I think it better not to discuss the subject. It's far too personal."

"I don't see how you can say such a thing, mother," said Ethel, with painstaking enunciation. "I think it our solemn duty to discuss matters that affect our souls. If there ever comes a time when I can't believe in God I want to die! I don't see how any one can live without the hope of a better world than this. Without that nothing would be worth while."

"Please don't think I want to destroy anyone's faith," John replied. "But for myself I try to keep tight hold of the idea that it's a part of our job to make that better world right here. And if we do that and there is a better place after death I don't believe any-

body's going to be kept out of it for not believing what he can't."

"John," began Haley with a deprecatory smile, "that's exactly where I used to stand! You don't need to feel discouraged about your doubts. If we just will to believe we can overcome everything. That's the truth, isn't it, Ethel?"

Ethel promptly affirmed his statement, and Mrs. Durland softened the affirmation out of deference for John's feelings.

"I think I agree with John," said Grace; "I'd like to believe a lot of things the church teaches but I can't; I'm always stumbling over some doubt."

"I didn't know *you* called yourself an agnostic," said Ethel severely.

"I don't know that it's necessary to classify myself," Grace replied coldly.

Haley volunteered to lend John certain books which he had found helpful in overcoming his own doubts. John listened attentively as Haley named them and replied that he had read them and when Mr. Durland asked John if he had read "The Age of Reason," Mrs. Durland thwarted Ethel's attempt to denounce that work by remarking that she thought they could all agree that every effort to promote peace and happiness in the world was worthy of encouragement.

"You've said something there, Mrs. Durland," said John soberly. "I'm strong for that."

"I guess that leaves us nothing to quarrel about after all," said Haley, beaming with tolerance.

Ethel resented her mother's interference with the religious discussion just when she was ready to sweep away all agnostic literature with a quotation. And she was displeased to find John again exchanging stories with Haley. She had counted much on the

beneficient exercise of John's influence on Grace after he settled in Indianapolis. Her father was hopeless where religion was concerned and she had no sympathy with her mother's oft-reiterated opinion that there was something good in all churches. Her indignation increased as good cheer again prevailed at the table. She waited till a lull in the story-telling gave her an opportunity to ask John, with an air of the utmost guilelessness, the proportion of women to men in the University. John answered and called upon Grace to verify his figures. Grace, familiar with Ethel's mental processes, groped for the motive behind the question. Her curiosity as to what her sister was driving at was quickly satisfied.

"I was just wondering, that's all," remarked Ethel carelessly. "I suppose I might have got the figures from the catalogue. Oh, by the way, John, Grace has spoken of so many of her friends in college I feel that I almost know them. Just the other day she was speaking of a Miss Conwell—Mabel, wasn't it, Grace? —who must be a very interesting girl. She had her uncle look Grace up when he was here recently."

"Conwell?" repeated John, looking inquiringly at Grace, who sat directly opposite him. "Do I know a Miss Conwell?" he asked and catching a hint from Grace's eyes that something was amiss he added, "There's such a lot of girls down there I get 'em all mixed up."

"She's from Jeffersonville, you said, didn't you, Grace?" asked Ethel.

"Jeffersonville or New Albany," Grace answered, "I'm always confusing those towns."

John was now aware that Grace was telegraphing for help.

"Oh, yes;" he exclaimed, "I remember Miss Con-

well. "I'd got the name wrong; I thought it was Conway. I run into her occasionally at the library."

"She doesn't seem to be in the catalogue," Ethel persisted, "but that may be because they don't know where she comes from."

Haley laughed boisterously at this. John, detecting a tinge of spite in Ethel's pursuit of a matter that apparently was of no importance, answered that he thought Miss Conwell hadn't taken up her work till after the fall term opened, which probably accounted for the absence of her name from the catalogue.

"She is a special, isn't she, Grace?" he asked.

"Yes; in English," Grace answered, with a defiant look at her sister.

"That's the girl who's related to Mr. Trenton?" asked Durland, vaguely conscious that Grace was under fire. "I thought that was the name. Trenton," he explained to Moore, "is a famous engineer. I guess there's nobody stands higher in his line."

"He's the husband of that Mary Graham Trenton who writes horrible books," announced Ethel.

"That's got nothing to do with Trenton's standing as an engineer," Durland replied doggedly.

"I guess no man has to stand for his wife's opinions these days," said John conciliatingly.

"Of course I don't know what Mr. Trenton's views are on the subjects his wife writes about," said Ethel. "But Grace probably knows."

"You couldn't expect me to violate Mr. Trenton's confidence," Grace replied.

Fortunately the meal was concluded and Mrs. Durland rose from the table.

"I'm awfully sorry, John," said Grace, when they reached the street. "There's no reason why Ethel should show her spite at me when we have company.

She thought with you there it would be easy to catch me in a lie. It was a nasty trick; but it was splendid of you to help me out."

"You don't need to thank me for that," said John. "Ethel was sore at me for being a heathen and she thought she'd pot us both with one shot. And I guess she did," he ended with a chuckle. "It would be easy for her to prove that there's no Mabel Conwell at the University. But why make so much fuss about it?"

"It's just her way of nosing into other people's affairs. If she hadn't been so nasty about Mr. Trenton in the first place I wouldn't have had to lie."

"It's too bad Ethel's got that spirit. It must be hard living with such a person."

Irene was waiting for them when they reached the Pendennis. Grace noted that her friend wore her simplest gown and hat, perhaps as an outward sign of the chastened mood in which Kemp's passing had left her. John sat between them and their enjoyment of the picture was enhanced by his droll comments.

"It's me for the simple life," said Irene at the end. "I'll dream of myself as that girl in the sunbonnet going down the lane with the jug of buttermilk for the harvest hands."

"The dream's as near as you'll ever come to it!" said Grace. "I can see you on a farm!"

"I'd be an ideal farmer's wife, wouldn't I, Mr. Moore? I've certainly got enough sense to feed the chickens."

"When you weren't doing that you could feed the mortgage," John replied. "Let's see, which one of you girls am I going to take home first?"

They went into a confectioner's for a hot chocolate and to discuss this momentous question. Irene lived in the East End, much farther from the theatre than

Grace. Grace insisted that if he took her home first she would think it because he wanted to spend more time with Irene.

"That would be perfectly satisfactory to me!" said Irene demurely.

"I don't know that I'd hate it so much myself," John replied.

"Do you ever use a taxi, Mr. Moore?" Irene asked.

"Not on the price of one Airedale!"

When he suggested seriously that the whole matter would be greatly simplified by taking a taxi Irene would not hear of it. She hadn't meant to hint; she was just joking. They continued their teasing until they reached a corner where Grace settled the matter.

"Irene wins!" she cried and before they knew what she was about she boarded her car and was waving to them derisively from the platform.

III

During the preparation of breakfast the next morning Ethel apologized for her conduct at the supper table.

"I didn't mean to speak of that matter at all, Grace. It's none of my business how you met Mr. Trenton. I don't want there to be any hard feeling between us. I realize that we look at things differently and I want you to know that before Osgood left last night I made it all right with him. I told him it was just a joke between you and me about Miss Conwell. I wouldn't want him to think we spend our time quarreling."

"I hope he thought it was funny," Grace returned. "I don't mind telling you that there's no such person as Miss Conwell. John backed me up just because he resented the way you were ragging me. He knew

perfectly well there's no Mabel Conwell at the University."

Mrs. Durland entered the kitchen in time to catch this last remark.

"I hope you know, Grace, that neither Ethel nor I have any wish to question you about your friends. I scolded Ethel for asking you about Miss Conwell before company. I'm sure she's sorry."

"I've apologized to Grace, mother," said Ethel meekly.

"We assume, Grace," said Mrs. Durland, "that you mean to hold fast to the ideals we've tried to teach you at home. We trust you, dear; you know that. You know all the dangers that a young girl's exposed to and I believe you mean to make something fine and beautiful of your life. I expect that of both you girls."

"I don't like being pecked at and quizzed," Grace replied. "I'll attend to the bacon, Ethel; you needn't bother about it."

"I hope you and John had a pleasant evening," said Mrs. Durland.

"Yes; it's a very good picture. We all enjoyed it. Irene went with us."

"Irene Kirby went with you and John to the picture show!" exclaimed Mrs. Durland. "I don't believe you said Irene was going."

"Grace naturally wouldn't mention it," said Ethel, lifting the lid of the coffee pot and closing it with a spiteful snap.

"Now, dear, let's think the best we can of everyone," said Mrs. Durland. She had with difficulty persuaded Ethel to apologize to Grace for questioning her about the imaginary Miss Conwell and it seemed for an instant that her efforts to promote harmony were to fail, now that Grace had mentioned Irene.

"Oh, it happened by accident!" Grace explained. "Irene and I were lunching together at the store and John strolled in looking for me. And he was polite enough to include Irene in his invitation."

"I'd hardly expect her to do anything as tame as going to a picture show," said Ethel.

"Well, as I've said before, Irene isn't as bad as you paint her. You probably wouldn't think she'd waste time on John, but they get on famously."

"John isn't quite what I thought he was," said Ethel, ignoring her mother's signal for silence.

"That's because he wouldn't let you choose a church for him," said Grace, gingerly drawing a pan of corn muffins from the oven. "John lives his religion, which is a lot better than parading it all the time."

"Now, Grace, Ethel didn't mean to reflect on John," Mrs. Durland hastened to explain.

"It may give you a better impression of John to know he's been very kind to Roy," said Grace.

"How's that, Grace?" asked Mrs. Durland quickly. "I didn't get a chance to ask John about Roy."

"John wouldn't have told you he'd been helping Roy even if you'd asked him. John doesn't advertise his good works. But I had a letter from one of the girls the other day and she was teasing me about John. She said he must be seriously interested in me for he'd been coaching Roy in his law work. I call it perfectly splendid of John when he has so much to do."

"It's certainly kind of John," said her mother, "I wish you'd told me so I could have thanked him. But I didn't suppose Roy needed coaching. He's working very hard; he's sent just scraps of letters all winter and gives as his excuse that he's too busy to write."

"We've all got to begin thinking about what Roy will do after he's graduated," said Ethel. "I've talked

to some of the lawyers who come into our office and they all say he'd better go into an office as clerk until he gets started. A young man can't just hang out his shingle and expect business to come to him."

"It's too bad your father isn't in a position to help Roy," sighed Mrs. Durland.

"Why not let Roy make some suggestions himself about what he wants to do," said Grace. "He's got to learn self-reliance sometime. John Moore hadn't anybody to boost him and he's already found a place in one of the best offices in town."

"But Roy's case is very different," replied Mrs. Durland, instantly on the defensive. "John's older for one thing and the hard work he's done to get his education naturally arouses sympathy. I want us all to make Roy feel our confidence in him. I'm getting anxious to have him home. He's going to be a great comfort to me and it will be fine for you girls to have your brother back. You can both of you do a lot for him. And, Grace, he can help you solve many of your problems,—socially I mean."

"I shall want Roy to know all my friends," said Ethel. "Since I've been with Gregg and Burley I've made a good many acquaintances among men who are in a position to help Roy."

"Roy's fine social side is bound to be a help to him in his profession," said Mrs. Durland. "He's always been a friendly boy."

"Yes, mother," Grace replied. "Roy certainly has a way of making friends."

She refrained from saying that these friends were not always wisely chosen. She dreaded the time when he would finish at the University and begin his efforts to establish a law practice. A good many young men of the best type of ambitious student had confided in

her as to their plans for the future and she thought she knew pretty well the qualities essential to success. Roy was blessed with neither initiative nor industry, and she knew as her mother and Ethel did not, the happy-go-lucky fashion in which he had played through his college course, and his rebellion against undertaking the law. It was quite like him to lean upon John Moore. He must be doing badly or John would not have volunteered to aid him.

As they ate breakfast, with Mr. Durland dividing attention between his food and his newspaper, Mrs. Durland's usual attempt to create an atmosphere of cheer for the day struck Grace as pathetic in its futlity. Hearing her father's voice she roused herself to find that her mother had asked him to look in the market reports for the quotations on turkeys. Christmas was approaching and Roy would be home; and Mrs. Durland was speculating as to whether a turkey for the Christmas dinner would be too serious a strain on the family budget. Durland shifted uneasily in his chair as his wife recalled that they had never been without a Christmas turkey since they were married. Grace noting the fleeting pain in her father's patient eyes, hastened to say that beyond question the turkey would be forthcoming. It was a relief to be out of the house, walking to the car with her father who was laden as usual with his notebooks and drawings.

CHAPTER NINE

I

"WHAT'S the difference, lady?

The remark she had heard the salesgirl make to the critical shopper was often in Grace's mind. What did anything really matter! But the aisles at Shipley's were crowded with importunate holiday shoppers, and she was able to forget herself in her work. She had been complimented by the superintendent of the store; she was already one of the most successful saleswomen in her department. She had earned as high as fifty dollars a week, not a contemptible sum, even if to earn it she had become Number Eighteen at Shipley's!

Four days passed and still no word from Trenton. On two nights Grace cried herself to sleep in a confusion of emotions—loneliness, fear that some evil had befallen him, mortification that she had listened to his protestations of love, and hope that he would yet explain himself. Her repeated efforts to shut him out of her mind failed miserably. She had not known until his communications ceased how much she counted on him, or how completely he had captivated her imagination.

As she waited for a customer to decide upon a wrap her gaze fell upon a young woman whom she recognized, after a bewildered moment of uncertainty, as Mrs. Bob Cummings.

Briskly summing up the arguments in favor of the garment her customer was considering, Grace was disagreeably conscious that Evelyn appeared to be waiting for an opportunity to speak to her. Grace answered perfunctorily the last question of her customer and made out the charge slip. As she concluded the

transaction and bade her customer good morning Evelyn crossed the room.

"Please pardon me, Miss Durland!" she began, half extending and then withdrawing her hand.

"Is there something I can show you?" asked Grace in her most business-like tone.

"Not a thing, Miss Durland," said Evelyn and smiled ingratiatingly. "You are terribly busy I know, but there's something I want to say to you; it will take only a minute. I'm sorry I was so rude the other night; may I—apologize?"

"That's quite unnecessary," said Grace coldly, and was instantly vexed that she had thought of no better response. Evelyn, embarrassed for a moment, smiled again. She was much prettier than Grace had thought her at McGovern's.

"It was all so ridiculous!" said Evelyn, now perfectly composed. "Bob's such a baby! I didn't mind at all your going out to supper with him. What I did mind was his acting like an idiot when I walked in on you. Jimmie was just as idiotic—the idea of explaining anything! And then *Bob* must try to explain! That bored me just as it bored you. Of course I wasn't going to let him explain! But I'm sorry I lost my temper and spoke to you as I did. Won't you forgive me?"

"If there's any forgiving to be done let's both do it!" said Grace; and they smiled at each other.

"Men are such fools!" exclaimed Evelyn, as though greatly relishing the statement. "Nothing ever pleased me more than the way you made Bob take you home. And then he came back to McGovern's and complained—actually complained to *me!*—that you had given him the slip! He did that—really he did! Can you imagine it?"

Her mirth over the affair had communicated itself to Grace. It hadn't occurred to her that Bob might have returned to McGovern's when she left him.

"Bob is so obvious!" Evelyn continued. "He's just got to have sympathy. Really, he wanted *me* to sympathize with him because you shook him in the road! Jimmy and I teased him till he cried for mercy. Bob's a dear boy but he needs just the jar you gave him. You were perfect! And you won't think the worse of me will you, for losing my temper?"

"Certainly not!" said Grace, "I've known Bob so long——"

"Yes; the moment Jimmy spoke your name I knew all about you, and understood everything. He wanted sympathy and being a sentimental person he sought you out of the score of old friendship. Just like him! Selfish is no name for him! But to think he was afraid of me! He gave himself away terribly! He's so meek now it's positively pathetic!"

To be laughing over Bob's frailities with Bob's wife was something that hadn't figured in Grace's calculations. The superintendent, on his way through the department, frowned to see Number Eighteen neglecting her duties to chat with a caller, but recognizing Mrs. Cummings he asked deferentially whether she was finding what she wanted.

"Miss Durland is taking excellent care of me," Evelyn replied. "I'm violating all the rules, I suppose," she said when the man had passed on. "If they scold you let me know and I'll speak to Mr. Shipley about it. Just one thing more! Bob has told me about your father and the way Mr. Cummings, senior, treated him. It wasn't fair; Bob says that. I'd like you to know I'm sorry——"

"It was all in the way of business," said Grace.

"I have no feeling about it; I'm only sorry for my father and mother. It was a blow they hadn't expected."

"It wasn't nice," said Evelyn decisively. "I wish we could really become acquainted. I'm going to ask you up for dinner soon—please don't say no! There are some young people I'd like you to meet. Goodbye and thank you ever so much."

II

Grace turned to a waiting customer with a kindlier feeling for all the world. She was uncertain whether in like circumstances she would have been capable of the kindness and generosity Evelyn had manifested. It pleased her to believe that her education in the ways of the changing, baffling world was progressing.

Evelyn Cummings was evidently a young woman without illusions; she knew exactly how to manage a temperamental husband. Marriage, as Grace viewed it with the three different illustrations afforded by Kemp, Trenton and Cummings, was of the realm of insubstantial things. Even the spectacle offered in her own home by her father and mother, between whom disappointment and adversity had reared a wall no less grim because of their steadfast loyalty, was hardly convincing on the other side of the picture. Stephen Durland and his wife were held together by habit, by a deeply implanted sense of duty to their children. Grace could not remember when her father had kissed her mother, or in any way manifested any affection for her. And yet in the beginning they must have loved each other. She wondered whether it was always like that!

She had given up all hope of hearing again from

Trenton when on the tenth day she received a note postmarked New York, that set her heart fluttering.

My Dear Little Girl:

What must you think of me! I think pretty poorly of myself, I can tell you. Picked up a cold on my way East. Pretended it didn't amount to anything; motored down into New Jersey for a week-end with some old friends. Got chilled on the drive; pneumonia almost. My host was afraid I'd die on his hands and made a frightful row—couple of doctors, nurse and all the other frills. . . . I had no way of letting you know. Found your letter when I came into town this morning. I'm away behind on my jobs. . . . The great thing is that I want to see you and look into those dear, dark eyes again. . . . One day at twilight down there in the country, I thought of you so intently that I really brought you into the room! The nurse was sitting beside the bed, then suddenly you were there, your dark head clearly outlined in the dusk. You lifted your hand to touch your hair—that's a pretty trick you have! You have so many dear ways—and you smiled—another sweet way you have!—the smile coming slowly, like a dawn, until it brightened all the world. The illusion was so perfect that it wasn't an illusion at all, but really you! I was terribly indignant at the nurse when she turned on the light and I lost you. . . . The doctor says I may travel in three or four days and my thoughts carry me in only one direction. You haven't sent me the telegram I hoped for; never mind about that. Please wire me that you are well. And if you put in a word to say that you want to see me I shall be the happiest man alive. Be assured of my love always.

He hadn't forgotten her; he really cared! She moved with a quicker step; her work had never gone so smoothly. While she had been doubting him, trying to put him out of her heart he had been ill. She was unsparing in self-accusation for what now seemed

the basest disloyalty. She tried to picture the room to which his longing had summoned her. Those lines in his letter moved her deeply and set her to speculating whether such a thing might not be possible in the case of two beings who loved each other greatly.

There was no intimation in the letter that his wife had been with him in his illness. Grace grew bitter as she thought of Mrs. Trenton, who was probably roaming the world preaching a new social order to the neglect of her husband. In countenancing Trenton as a lover Grace found Mrs. Trenton's conduct her most consoling justification. It came down to this, that if Ward Trenton's wife failed in her marital obligations there was no justice in forbidding him to seek happiness elsewhere.

This view was in fact advanced in Mary Graham Trenton's "Clues to a New Social Order." It seemed a fair assumption that Mrs. Trenton wouldn't advocate ideas for all mankind that she wouldn't tolerate in her own husband.

At her lunch hour Grace went to the telegraph office and sent this message:

"Greatly troubled by your illness. Please take good care of yourself. You may be sure I shall be glad to see you."

"Straight telegram, paid," the clerk repeated perfunctorily, and swept the message under the counter. The sending of the telegram gave Grace a gratifying sense of kinship with the larger world which Trenton's love had revealed to her. She found happiness all the afternoon in wondering just what he would be doing and how he would look when the message reached him. She wrote that night the longest letter she had yet written him. She thought often of what Irene had said about wanting to be loved. To be loved, in

the great way that Miss Reynolds had said was the only way that counted,—this had become the great desire of her heart. Old restraints and inherited moral inhibitions still resisted her impulse to fashion her life and give herself as she pleased. She meant to be very sure of Trenton and even more sure of her own heart before committing herself further. She was not, she kept assuring herself, an ordinary or common type. She dropped into her letter several literary allusions and a few French phrases with a school girl's pride in her erudition. There were times when Grace was very young!

Trenton's next letter reported his complete recovery. He was working hard to make up for lost time, but would leave for the West as soon as possible and hoped to spend Christmas in Indianapolis. Incidentally he had business there in which she might be able to assist him. This was further explained in a typewritten enclosure which he asked her to deliver to her father. He warned her that the inquiry might lead to nothing, but there were certain patents held in Stephen Durland's name which he wished to investigate.

"The name Durland," he wrote, "gave me a distinctly pleasant shock when the memorandum turned up on my desk in the routine of the office. There may be a place where I can use some of your father's ideas; but in this business we're all pessimists. I appoint you my agent and representative on the spot. Don't let your father dispose of any of the patents described in my letter till we can have an interview."

She made the noon hour the occasion for one of her picnic lunches with her father in his work shop.

He looked up from a model he was tinkering and greeted her with his usual, "That you, Grace?"

"Very much Grace!" she answered, tossing her

packages on the bench. "What are you on today—perpetual motion or a scheme for harnessing the sun?"

"A fool thing a man left here the other day; wanted me to tell him why it didn't work. It doesn't work because there's no sense in it."

As he began to explain why the device was impracticable she snatched off his hat and flinging it aside with a dramatic flourish handed him a sandwich.

"Don't waste your time on such foolishness; we're only interested in machines that work!"

She sprang upon the bench and produced Trenton's letter.

"Let your eye roam over that, old top! And don't tell me you've let somebody take those things away from you."

Durland pondered the letter, lifting the business sheet closer to his eyes as he examined Trenton's small neat signature. He walked to a closet and extracted some papers from the confused mass within.

"Well, daddy, what's the answer?"

"I got those patents all right; they cover my improvements on my old gas engine Cummings is making. There's already been a fellow nosing round asking about 'em; from Cummings I guess. I got something now that's going to interest everybody that's making motors; something I been working at two or three years. Cummings can't have 'em. He hasn't got any right to 'em!"

His eyes flashed as his hatred of Cummings for the moment possessed him. Grace had never taken seriously her father's hints that Cummings might have got rid of him too soon. She had never before seen him so agitated. He paced the floor, reiterating that his former associate should never profit by his im-

provements on any of the old Cummings-Durland devices. He paused, picked up an apple and bit into it savagely.

"Now, daddy," said Grace, "it isn't at all like you to flare up that way. Mr. Trenton hasn't a thing to do with Cummings; I happen to know that. But he's a business adviser and particular friend of Kemp."

"Kemp!" Durland repeated, lifting his head with a jerk. "You think maybe Kemp's interested? Kemp could use these patents; there isn't a thing in these improvements that wouldn't fit right into Kemp's motor!"

"That's perfectly grand! Now that you've got your patents, what you want to do is to sit back and wait. There must be something pretty good in your ideas or Mr. Trenton wouldn't be interested. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the dollars would begin to roll in?"

"I've been fooled a lot of times, Grace," he answered, picking up his hat, staring at it as though it were an unfamiliar thing and clapping it on his head. "I guess you better not say anything about this at home. If it doesn't come to anything I don't want your mother disappointed."

"Of course not; it's our big secret, daddy. I just love having secrets with you. After the row at home the other night about Mr. Trenton's niece we'd better never mention him."

"What was that all about, Grace?" he asked frowning. "I didn't get what Ethel was drivin' at."

"Just making herself disagreeable, that's all. I told a fib, but Ethel had no business to attack me that way before guests."

"Ethel's kind o' different somehow," he said, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth. "I guess she means all right. Funny, you children ain't any

of you alike," he went on ruminatively. "I don't ever seem to get much out o' Ethel and Roy."

"Roy and Ethel are both fond of you, daddy. And you know I adore you; I'm simply crazy about you!"

She pounced upon him and threw her arms about his neck, laughing at his struggles to avoid the kisses she distributed over such parts of his face as were free of grime.

"You're a mighty fine girl, Grace. There mustn't anything happen to you," he said, freeing himself.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid, you dear angel! Nothing's going to happen to me! Here's where I skip—vamoose—disappear! I'm going to take you to a show tonight—yes, I am! You be awfully surprised when I spring it at supper."

III

Trenton wrote again that he would reach town at noon of Christmas day and expected to remain a week.

"Why didn't you tell me Ward's been sick?" asked Irene when Grace told her that he was coming. "You're certainly the secretive little one."

"How did you know it?" Grace demanded. "You and Tommy made up?"

The girls were putting up stock at the end of the day and quiet reigned over the department, broken only by the voices of gossiping employees.

"I've been dying to tell you something all day," said Irene holding up her hand on which the emerald had been restored to it's old place. "Yes; Tommy told me about Ward."

"Well——"

"Oh, I've just taken him back on trial," said Irene

with a sigh. "Poor Tommy! Minnie got me up to her apartment last night for supper and who should walk in but Tommy! He swore that girl in Chi didn't mean anything in his life. He saw her just once when he had dinner with her and some other people; he was careful to mention the other people! I believed him even if he had denied the whole business on the telephone. Tommy looks terribly pathetic. He's going to die if he doesn't check up. His wife's gone to California for the winter, and he's drowning his sorrow in too much booze. Another victim of prohibition! Tommy's one of the million who didn't know he had to have it till they took it away from him!"

"Well, I'm glad you've fixed it up. It's much nicer to be friends with him."

"Just a friend, that's all," replied Irene, slowly shaking her head. "The poor boy really needs somebody to keep him straight. From what he said his wife went away in disgust. Why don't these women stay at home and look after their husbands and not leave the job to us poor working girls!"

"Irene, you're a perfect scream! Don't make me laugh like that or we'll never get this stuff put away."

"It's not a laughing matter," said Irene, maintaining her tone of lofty indignation. "I can tell you right now that a woman who parks her husband's taking an awful chance."

Before they separated Irene warned Grace that Kemp had it in mind to drive them with Trenton to The Shack Christmas afternoon.

"He wanted us to have dinner out there but I told him nothing doing. I'd promised to play with my family and besides I can't let him think I'm forgiving him too easy."

IV

On Christmas morning as Grace was helping in the kitchen John Moore called her on the telephone. He had moved to town the day before and thought it would be fine if they could ride to the end of one of the trolley lines that afternoon and take a tramp. Grace excused herself with the plea that she already had an engagement to go to a matinee.

She sang about her work, watching the clock to mark the approach of the hour of Trenton's arrival. His coming would bring a crisis in her life. The exchange of gifts in the household, the cheer all the members of the family were trying to bring to the day and the train of associations the festival inevitably awakened touched her; but not as in other years. There was a difference now. She stood free, self-assured, confidently seeing in life a great adventure.

As quickly as possible after dinner she flew to her room to dress, and at half past two reached Minnie Lawton's, where she found Irene waiting.

"Tommy took Ward to The Shack from the train. They had dinner out there. Tommy's car's waiting, so we'll prance right along."

Grace was disappointed at not seeing Trenton at Minnie's and on the drive to The Shack talked little.

"You either don't want to see him at all, or you're consumed with anxiety," commented Irene.

Kemp had given her a thousand dollar bond for a Christmas present. Her acceptance of the gift she mentioned without apology. She was going to save her money, she said in her spacious manner; a girl who didn't put away something for a rainy day was a fool.

The car was stopped suddenly just inside the

entrance to Kemp's farm and Trenton smilingly opened the door.

"Merry Christmas! Tommy refused to leave the fire!—the poor old salamander! But being of tougher fibre, here I am to meet you!"

His unexpected appearance had found Grace unprepared and she was grateful for the moment his banter with Irene gave her to adjust herself. He stood with head bared, the wind ruffling his hair. The astrakan collar of his overcoat, turned up about his neck, set off effectively his handsome head and high-bred face. He was indubitably handsome, a man to be noticed in a crowd. Grace felt a new pride in the knowledge that he loved her. She laughed at some mocking reply he gave Irene and found his gaze upon her, the grave eyes all tenderness.

"For heaven's sake, get in, Ward!" exclaimed Irene. "You'll catch your death standing there."

"I'm going to live forever! Grace, are you shod for a walk? Then we'll let Irene drive on!"

He led the way to a point where the driveway skirted a woods-pasture, and opened a gate. The sense of strangeness at being with him again passed quickly as he began answering her questions about his illness. He declared that he was too well-seasoned to be killed by a cold. And besides he had found that he had something to live for, and that made a difference. A year before he would have relinquished his life without regret; now through her he had found the hope and the promise of life.

"I couldn't bear the idea of going indoors until I'd had you all to myself a little while."

The trees rose tall and black against the bluest of winter skies. A southwest wind whined fitfully among the boughs overhead. Grace felt the power of

elemental forces in her blood. She was a free spirit in a world where the children of men were created of all time to be free. Through what Trenton was saying and her replies this thought was dominant. It lifted her to a mood of exaltation; it seemed that she could touch the heavens with her finger tips. A branch of brier caught her skirt and Trenton was quickly on his knees to free it. He looked up into her face before he rose and she touched his cheek with her hand,—lightly and caressingly.

"I make you my true knight," she said. "Arise, Sir Ward!"

He rose and took her in his arms.

"Oh, my dearest! This is worth waiting for; this is worth living for!"

"You are so dear," she whispered; "you are so wonderful!"

"Have you missed me; have you really thought of me?" he asked. "Do I really mean something to you?"

"Not something, but everything!"

There was a sob in her throat. She clung to him, laying her cheek to his face, calling him by endearing names that were new to her lips. "Sometimes I doubted you, dear. When I didn't hear from you I thought you'd forgotten; and it hurt me so!"

"I understand how that would be," he said tenderly. "I'd have let you know if there'd been any way. I was afraid to ask my friends to telegraph; it would have involved explanations."

"I only want your forgiveness. I'll never doubt you again, dear!"

"We must have faith in each other; we must trust each other," he said. "You know I'd trust you round the world."

She clasped her arms about his neck and held him in a long kiss to seal his faith in her. As they went on she told him about Bob Cummings and the visit to McGovern's.

"It was to give myself a chance to forget you. I wanted to see if I *could* forget you. All that day I had thought of you so steadily that I was unhappy. I hated the thought of going home and sitting in my room and thinking of you. Can you understand how that would be?"

As she began the story in a tone that was half self-accusation, half apology, he teasingly pretended to make something tragic of it, but when he saw that it was a matter of conscience with her to confess he hastened to make it easy for her. Assured that he saw in the episode no disloyalty she gave every humorous twist to the incident. He laughed till the woods rang when she described the manner in which she had slipped away from Cummings and taken the trolley home.

"I'm warned now," he said, "but don't you ever try running away from me!"

"Oh, I don't know!" she cried. "I dare you to catch me!" She vaulted the fence into a corn field and alertly dodged him as he pursued her over the stubble and among the shocks. She was fleet of foot and easily outdistanced him. She ended the long chase by hiding behind a shock and then as he blundered about seeking her, she sprang out and flung her arms about him.

"It's time to go to the house," he said, glancing at the lowering sun. "Tommy threatened to have tea. We'll take another way back; it's longer!"

"Isn't it too bad that things must end? I wish today could last forever!"

"Let's think of it only as the beginning! Today I refuse to think of anything disagreeable. I only ask to be sure you belong to me."

"Oh, dear and splendid one, you don't question it!" A smile played about her lips and her dark eyes were afire. "I love you!" she whispered. "I love you! I love you!"

The path they were following paralleled the highway at this point and as they clung to each other a man passed in the road, walking rapidly toward town. He could hardly have failed to see their embrace.

It was John Moore, taking alone the tramp he had asked Grace to share with him. He paused and stared, lifted his hat and hurried on.

CHAPTER TEN

I

GRACE and Trenton had sprung apart as Moore passed in the highway and they waited in silence until the sound of his even step over the hard macadam died away. The romp through the corn field had lossened her hair and she began thrusting it back under her hat. Trenton, straightening his tie, looked the least bit crestfallen.

"Who was that?" he asked.

"John Moore, an awfully nice fellow I knew in college. He's just moving to Indianapolis to go into the law."

"There's no question but he saw us. It's so easy to forget there are other people in the world! I hope his seeing us won't embarrass you."

"Oh, John's all right," she replied. "The only embarrassment is that I fibbed to him about this afternoon. He asked me to go walking,—we did a lot of tramping at college—and I told him I was going to a matinee."

"Well, you were!" laughed Trenton; then with an attempt at carelessness, "Is he a suitor?"

"Heavens, no! But I admire John as every one does who knows him. He's a mighty good friend, and the kindest soul in the world."

As they resumed their walk toward The Shack she continued talking of John, Trenton manifesting a sympathetic interest and asking questions to elicit further anecdotes of Moore's varied activities at the University.

"He may be in love with you," he suggested. "You see I can't help being just a little jealous of every man you knew before you knew me."

"If John's in love with me he's very successful in concealing it!" she laughed. "No; strange as it may seem, he likes to talk to me and I'm proud of his friendship. He does a lot of reading and thinking. He's a fine character and you'd be sure to like him. He's leaving the law school to go into Judge Sander's office; the Judge has picked him for a winner."

"I know Sanders; he's Tommy's lawyer. I see I'll have to keep an eye on Moore," he went on teasingly. "I'm not sure he isn't likely to become a dangerous rival!"

"I wish I were sure you could be jealous! Maybe I'm jealous too! Hasn't that ever occurred to you?"

She was a little frightened at her temerity in asking a question that was the crystalization of her constant speculation as to his attitude toward his wife. There flashed through her mind everything he had said of Mrs. Trenton, which, to be sure, was very little though the little required clarifying. She recalled the apology in his St. Louis letter for having spoken of Mrs. Trenton at all. In that first talk at The Shack he had led her to believe that his wife gave him wide liberty to do as he pleased; but it was conceivable that a woman might indulge her husband's acquaintance with women she did not know and was not likely to meet without sanctioning infidelity. Grace had persuaded herself that there was a distinct difference between entering into a liason with a man who still maintained martial relations with his wife and one who did not. She was vastly pleased with the moral perception that showed her this. And she was confident that she had the will to dismiss him if his explanation of the

modus vivendi that existed between him and his wife should prove to be unsatisfactory.

The cowpath they were traversing made it necessary for them to walk singly and he went ahead, holding back the boughs that hung over the trail. For a few minutes she thought he meant to ignore her question but suddenly he stopped and swung round.

"I know what you're thinking of," he said quietly. "You're thinking of Mrs. Trenton."

He pulled a twig from a young maple and broke it into tiny bits. Grace wondered whether this trifling unconscious act might not symbolize the casting aside of such slight ties as bound him to his wife.

"Yes, I've thought of her a great deal. You couldn't blame me for that."

"No; that's wholly natural," he said quickly. "You wouldn't be the woman I know you to be if you didn't. You have a right to know just what my relations are with my wife. I'll be frank about it. I loved her when I married her and I believe she loved me."

There was an appeal for sympathy in his eyes, a helplessness in his tone that was new to her knowledge of him. It was as though the thought of Mrs. Trenton brought a crushing depression upon him. Jealousy yielded to pity in her heart; she was touched with something akin to maternal solicitude for his happiness. But she wished to know more; the time had come for an understanding of his attitude toward his wife and of Mrs. Trenton's toward him.

"Does love really die?" she asked almost in a whisper. "If you two loved each other once how can you tell whether the love is dead or not?"

"It's the saddest thing in the world," he said, smiling in his tolerance of her ignorance, "that love can and does die. Mrs. Trenton and I meet rarely now;

but our estrangement came about gradually. I admit that the fault has been more than half mine. In every such case there's always fault on both sides. When I saw that her interests were carrying her away from me, and particularly after she began to be a public character through her writing and lecturing, I might have asserted myself a little more strongly—let her know that I wanted her and needed her even if the first passion was gone. But—you may laugh at this—I had old-fashioned ideas that didn't square with her new notions of things. I wanted children and a home of the traditional kind. Possibly it was in my mind," he smiled wanly, "that I expected my wife to bring my slippers and mother me when I was tired. All men are babies, you know; but all women don't understand that. Probably there's where the trouble began. And I found myself more and more alone as Mrs. Trenton got deeper into her reform work. She likes the excitement of moving about and stirring people up. I think she even enjoys being criticized by the newspapers. I'm a peaceful person myself and can't quite understand that. We still keep a house in Pittsburgh but I haven't seen Mrs. Trenton there for a long time. I doubt whether she any longer considers it her domicile. When we've met it's been by accident or where I've made the opportunity by going to some place where she was lecturing. The breach has widened until we're hardly more than acquaintances. She's said that if I ever found a woman I thought I'd be happy with to be frank about it. It may be in her mind to free me if I ask it. I don't know. And that's the situation."

"You don't—you're sure you don't—love her any more?" Grace asked, uttering the words slowly.

"No"; he answered meeting her direct gaze with a

candor that was a part of his charm for her. "That's all over. It was over before I met you. But I suppose, after a fashion, I'm still fond of her; she was always interesting and amusing. Even as a girl she'd been a great hand to take up with new ideas. When the suffrage movement developed she found she could write and speak and I saw less of her to a point where we began an existence quite independent of each other. I want you to be satisfied about this; if there's anything you want to know——"

"No; I believe you and I think I understand. And I'm sorry—very sorry for your unhappy times. I wish——"

"Yes, dear——"

"Oh, you're so fine; so kind, so deserving of happiness! I want so much to help you find it. I want to be of real use to you. You deserve so much of life."

"But—do I deserve you!" he asked softly.

She answered with a look all eloquent of her love, and kissed him.

When they reached the house they found Irene and Kemp in the living room engaged in a heated argument over Irene's preemption of a bottle of whiskey which she had seized to prevent his further consumption of the contents.

"Take it, Ward!" Irene cried, flinging off Kemp's hold upon her arm and handing the bottle to Trenton. "Tommy's had too much. I'm going to take him home."

"Gimme tha' bottle; gotta have another drink," blurted Kemp, lunging toward Trenton.

"Not another drop!" said Trenton, passing the bottle to Grace, who ran with it to the dining room and told Jerry to hide it. Kemp, caught in Trenton's

arms, drew back and stared, grinning stupidly in his befuddlement at the legerdemain by which the bottle had eluded him.

"Tommy's a naughty boy," said Irene. "He's nasty when he's drunk. Hands off!" she cried as Kemp again menaced her. "Don't you dare touch me!"

"Not goin' home. Never goin' home. Goin' to shtay right here," declared Kemp, tottering as he attempted to assume an attitude of defiance.

The Japanese boy had brought in the tea tray and was lighting the kettle-lamp.

"Everythin's goin' fine," Kemp continued, indicating the tray with a flourish. "Have nice chat over teacups—hiccups—tea-cups—joke, ha, ha! Guests drink tea; host drink whisk—key—thass thirty year ole, Ward. Can't change drinks; always makes me sick change drinks. Where's tha' bottle?"

"You've spoiled everything by getting drunk," said Irene viciously. "You're going home. You know what you told me the other night at Minnie's. Your doctor's warned you to cut out the booze or you'll die. Your heart won't stand it."

Kemp turned toward her slowly, opening and closing his eyes in the effort to comprehend this statement. He was very white; Trenton was watching him with deep concern.

"Nothin' the matter with me. Jus' foolin' 'bout doctor. Hadda get lil' sympathy out o' Irene."

"I'll put you to bed, Tommy," said Trenton. "A nap will pull you out of this."

"No y' don't, Ward, old man! Not slippy; not bit slippy."

"He's got a dinner engagement in town at seven and I've got a date myself," said Irene. "I'll take him home. The chauffeur will look after him. There's

no use letting him spoil the day for you and Grace. You came out in the runabout, didn't you, Jerry? Jerry can walk over to the interurban when he's ready to go and you two can take your time about going in. You can manage the runabout, can't you, Ward?"

"That's easy enough," Trenton replied, frowning in his perplexity as he eyed Kemp, who had stumbled to a chair where he sat breathing heavily. "But I don't like your going in alone with Tommy."

Irene bent over Kemp and drew a phial from his pocket. She shook out a tablet and placed it in his mouth. The vigilant Japanese boy was ready with a glass of water.

"Strych-ni-ah," explained Kemp with a drunken grin. "How you come think o' that, Irene? First aid 'n all that sor' thing. Givin' me poison; thass wha' she's doin'. Forgot I had tha' stuff in my pocket. Awfu' funny. Doctor cut off whiskey and gimme rat poison. Mos' singular. Mos' incomree—in-com-pre-hens-ble."

He lay back in his chair and threw out his legs, wagging his head as he laughed inordinately at his lingual difficulties. When Trenton tried to feel his pulse he good-naturedly resisted. He was perfectly all right; never felt better in his life, he declared.

The question of his immediate return to town was peremptorily settled by Irene, who rang for the car.

"His heart's certainly doing queer things," said Trenton. "It would be better for us all to go in."

"Oh, he'll come out of it. It's nearly dark and I'll open the car window and give him air. Craig's driven him for years and he'll look after him at home. I'm sick of this business. If he wants to kill himself let him go ahead."

"He oughtn't to be left alone at home," said Grace.

"You'd better go in with him, Ward, and see that he has the doctor."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Irene decisively. "I've been through this before and his heart kicking up this way doesn't mean anything. Alcohol hits him quick but it doesn't last long. He really didn't have enough to make a baby tipsy. But he never learns that he can't stand it. You two just forget all about him."

Craig, the chauffeur, came in with Kemp's coat and they got him into it; but Kemp played for delay. His dinner engagement was of no consequence; he insisted that Irene could go alone if she pleased; she was a quitter and above all things he hated a quitter. His engagement to dine was at the Isaac Cummings's, and the fact that he was asked there called for an elaborate explanation which he insisted on delivering from the door. People were always boring him by asking him to do things when his wife was away, from a mistaken idea that a man alone in town is a forlorn and pitiable being, subject to the wiles of people he cares nothing for and in normal circumstances avoids. He warmed to the work of abusing Cummings; it was an impertinence on the part of his business competitor to invite him to his house. The Cummingses were climbers; his wife detested Mrs. Cummings, and if she had been home he wouldn't have been trapped into an engagement of which he now profoundly repented; and besides the dinner would be dry; he would never be able to sit through it. The insistence of the others that it was a formal function and that it was too late to withdraw his acceptance aroused him to an elaborate elucidation of the Cummings's offer of hospitality. Cummings was hard up; he had sunk a lot of money in oil ventures. Kemp re-

cited a list of Cummings's liabilities, tracing imaginary tables of figures on the wall with an unsteady finger and turning to his auditors for their concurrence in his opinion that Cummings was on the verge of bankruptcy.

"Playin' up to me; thinks Tom Kemp's goin' help him out! Poor boob'd like to merge—merge his business with me—me! No y' don't, Mr. Cummings!" he bowed mockingly to an imaginary Cummings. The bow would have landed him on the floor if Trenton hadn't caught him.

"Jes' foolin'; don' need to hol' me, Ward," he said, straightening himself. "Goin' home ri' now. Miss Kirby take my arm! Guess I know my manners; or'nary courtesy due lady 'nevery part th' worl'."

Irene steadied him to the car, and after Craig had lifted him in he waved his hand to Trenton and Grace with an effort at gaiety.

"House all yours, Ward; make y' present ole Shack. Burn it down; do's y' please. Jerry'll give y' anythin' y' want—wine 'neverythin'."

II

Grace and Trenton watched the car turn the long bend toward the highway and hurried back to the fire of hickory logs that crackled merrily in the living-room fire-place.

"Now for tea!" said Grace. "I ate a huge dinner but our tramp's given me a new appetite."

She sat down before the tray while he stood by the hearth, resting his elbow on the mantel-shelf, watching her. Jerry asked if he should turn on the lights.

"Thank you, no, Jerry;" Grace answered. "The fire gives light enough. No; don't trouble about din-

ner. You might give us some sandwiches with our tea."

There was a broad smile on Trenton's face as he took his cup and sat down near her.

"What's the joke, Ward?" she asked. She was now finding it easy to call him Ward.

"It's not a joke; I was just admiring your manner of addressing Jerry. It was quite perfect. He was greatly impressed by it."

"Oh, was that it! What did you expect me to do—snap at him?"

"No; I was only thinking how charming you'd be as the lady of a great house. Your slaves would worship you. Jerry caught the idea too; I never saw him bow so low."

"Jerry's adorable," she murmured, her eyes flashing her appreciation of Trenton's compliment. "But, really I must look awful; my hair's in a mess. I'll run upstairs and give it a smoothing as soon as we've had tea."

"Please don't! I like it that way. The dark frame for your face adds a charm that's bewildering!"

"What did Tommy mean about Cummings?" she asked presently. "Isn't the Cummings business prospering?"

"Tommy must know what he's talking about. He never quite loses his head even when he's drunk. These are anxious times and it's quite possible that Cummings is hard up. Tommy can afford to feel easy because he's well off even without his manufacturing business. I've got to do something about Tommy, though," he went on thoughtfully. "His New York doctor told me he'll have to stop his monkey shines or something unpleasant will happen to him. While I'm here I'm going to try to get him

to submit to treatment. But he's not easy to manage —frankly says he prefers a short life and a merry one. We've got to save Tommy if we can."

He smiled a little sadly. Grace liked the way he talked of Kemp and listened attentively while he gave many instances of Tommy's kindness and generosity.

"About your father's improvements on the motor," Trenton continued, "I'll go into that while I'm here. From the claims of the new patents it would appear that he's got something of real value; but we'll have to give them a try-out. We can do that at Kemp's shop. Of course Tommy will be anxious to get the new ideas if they're practical."

"Even a small success just now will mean so much to father," said Grace. "He was greatly excited by your letter and had to be convinced that you weren't acting for Cummings. He pretends to mother that there was nothing unfair in Cummings's treatment of him, but deep down in his heart he's terribly bitter."

A fire makes for intimacy and their concord was now so complete that silence had all the felicity of speech. The perfect expression of love may be conveyed in a glance and from time to time their eyes met in communications too precious for words. After these mute periods the talk would ripple on again unhurriedly as though they were the inheritors of immeasurable time.

In moments of animation when her dark eyes flashed and she smilingly invited his response she disclosed now and beguiling charms. In its disorder her hair emphasized what Irene was fond of calling Grace's gypsy look.

The tea disposed of, she sent away the tray and as his cigarette case was empty she filled it from a box Jerry found for her.

"It seems funny to be using other people's things this way," she remarked. "It's like finding a house in perfect running order on a desert island."

"You don't know what a joy it is to be waited on in this fashion."

He looked up at her fondly as she stood beside him. When she returned the case he drew her upon his knees, took her hand and scrutinized it closely. He pressed a kiss upon the palm and closed his fingers upon it.

"How long will you keep it?" he asked.

"The hand?" she asked provokingly.

"No; what I've just put into it!"

"Oh, I don't need to keep that, do I? Won't there be some more?"

"Millions!" he replied and clasped her tight.

"Your hands are finely shaped and interesting, Ward. Oh, you have a double life line! You'll never die! The Mount of Apollo is wonderfully developed—don't you see it, right there? Of *course* that's what that is. It's plain enough why music affects you so. You really might have been an artist of some kind yourself."

This called for an argument in the course of which she got illuminative glimpses of him as a boy who was always interested in machinery. He had been predestined to the calling he had chosen but confessed that sometimes he wished that he had tried his hand at executive work.

"I may do it yet," he said. "I have opportunities occasionally, which I'm probably foolish to let pass, to take hold of big concerns. But I've liked my freedom to roam. It's helped solve my problem to be able to wander."

"Yes, I understand, dear," she said softly, stroking

his hair. She knew that by his problem he meant his wife. Though she had accepted as sincere his explanation of his relations with Mrs. Trenton, she resented in spite of herself even this remote reference to the woman whom she had never seen but had constantly tried to visualize.

"I might even move to Indianapolis one of these days," he was saying. "I have a standing offer from Tommy to come and help him run his plant. I tell him it's his game to wish his job on me so he can have more time to play. And Tommy doesn't need that!"

She drew from his waistcoat pocket the locket that had so aroused her curiosity at their first meeting.

"What's in this, Ward?" she asked, holding up the round gold trinket.

"Oh, *that!*" he said, frowning at it.

"Don't look so cross! Must I tease you to show me what's inside?"

As she dangled it at arm's length he encouraged the idea that its contents were secret by snatching it away.

"It's the darkest of mysteries. What will you give me for a peep?"

"I might give you one kiss," she said, deliberating, "if I like what's inside."

"Oh, I must have three!"

"Agreed. But don't show me if you don't want to."

"Well, it's a great concession, a privilege reserved only for royalty."

He opened the locket guardedly, so turning it as to conceal the inner surfaces.

"Just a moment, please. Do you stand by the bargain?"

"Absolutely."

He gave it to her, laughing at her disappointment at finding it empty.

"Fraud!" she exclaimed. "How long has it been empty?"

"Do you really want to know?" he asked, suddenly grave.

"Yes; but not if you'd rather not tell me."

"I can't give the exact date, but you can approximate it for yourself. Do you remember the first time I wrote you—from St. Louis? It seems aeons ago!"

"Yes; I'll never forget that."

"Well, that night I took out and destroyed a little photograph I'd carried there for a good many years. I'll leave you to guess why I didn't care for it any more."

"Your wife's picture?"

"Yes; I bought the locket right after we were engaged and the picture had been there until I took it out that night in St. Louis."

"Tell me more about how you came to take it out," she asked with the insistence of a child demanding the continuation of a story. "Didn't it have any kind of meaning for you any more,—not even little associations—memories—you wouldn't lose?"

"No; it was as though something had died in me and utterly ceased to be. I was wondering about a lot of things that night. After I had written to you I wrote a letter to Mrs. Trenton. She had said from time to time that if I ever found myself interested in another woman not to be afraid to tell her. I don't know how seriously she meant that. Odd as it may seem, I don't *know* Mrs. Trenton! I used to think I did but that was sheer conceit on my part. As long as she had made that suggestion—about telling her if I met a woman who really appealed to me more than

she did—I thought I'd tell her about you. Oh, I didn't tell your name nor where you live!" he exclaimed seeing the look of consternation on Grace's face. "My agreement with her was half a joke; in later years I've never quite known when to take her seriously. I suppose I wrote her more to feel her out as to whether she might not have reached the point where it would be a good thing to quit altogether."

"Well," Grace asked, "what did she say?"

"Oh, so far her only answer has been a magnificent silence! The philosophers agree, don't they, that a woman doesn't always mean what she says? But a silence is even more baffling. What would you say about it?"

"A little ominous—perhaps——"

"Contempt, disdain, indifference? Maybe she's just awaiting further advices, as we say in business."

"Possibly she never got the letter."

"That's conceivable; she's a fast traveler; the mails have hard work to catch up with her."

"You don't really know whether she got the letter or what she would have written if she received it. Maybe she's just waiting for a chance to talk to you about it."

"Well, in any event we needn't worry about it," said Trenton with a shrug. She rose and drew up a low rocker and sat beside him, facing the fire.

"I'd like to have seen your letter," said Grace, musingly.

"I told her you kissed me. Like a brave man I put the responsibility on you!"

"Oh, that wasn't fair!" she cried hastily. "It would be sure to give her a bad impression of me."

"I think I intimated that it was only such a kiss as a daughter might bestow upon a father she didn't

think so badly of! I shall always be glad that our first kiss was like that; we've traveled a long way since then."

"Every step has been so dear," she said contentedly. "I think I could never forget one single thing. I don't believe I've forgotten a word you've ever said to me. And when you were away I lived our times all over again. And I like to imagine that we talk to each other by our own private wireless even when you are miles away. I think I can imagine just what you would say and how you would look when you said it. Oh,—" she bent forward quickly and grasped his hand in both of hers; her lips quivered and there was a mist in her eyes. "Oh!—I wish I didn't love you so *much!*"

"Has it occurred to you," he asked, "that we're alone away out here in the woods?"

"I don't feel a bit lonesome; I'd never be afraid anywhere with you!"

The fire had burned low and she watched admiringly his manner of replenishing it. He used the shovel to push back the ashes and bring the embers together in a neat bed, in the center of which he dropped a fresh log with calculated accuracy. It was his scientific mind, she reflected, habituated to careful planning even in unimportant things. He stood for a moment inspecting his work; moved the log a trifle; watched attentively the effect of the change, and as the dry loose bark broke into flame brushed the hearth neatly and smiled into her eyes as he found her at his side.

"You do everything just right! I love to see you use your hands," she said. "They're so strong and skillful."

"I ought to know something about fires; I've made

enough of them. As a young fellow I did a lot of jobs that took me into remote places, surveying and construction gangs; and I've camped a bit—hunting and fishing. I might even say that I can make coffee and fry bacon without utterly destroying their food values."

She established him before the fire in the most comfortable chair in the room and sat at his feet. With her arms folded upon his knees to make a resting place for her head she listened with the rapt attention a child gives to a beguiling chronicler as he told how he was lost for three days in the Canadian wilds, and of a flight by canoe on a stormy night to fetch a doctor for one of his party who had fallen ill. He had given her from the first a sense of far horizons, and tonight her fancy perfected every picture his narratives suggested of hills and woodlands and streams. They constituted a new back-ground against which she saw in him an heroic figure equal to any demand that might be made upon his strength and courage.

"One of these days," he went on, "We must do the Canadian Rockies together; and then I'd like to take you to some places I know in Maine—just guides and canoes and *us;* and I want to do India before I die, but not without you. You're in all my future! I want to live a long time to enjoy life with you. Does that appal you?"

She was gazing wide-eyed into the fire, her dark eyes the harbor of dreams, and he laughed and bent forward to touch her cheek and break the spell that bound her.

"I should love it *all,* dear!" she said with a happy sigh. "To be with you, to share everything with you! Oh, that would be more happiness than I could bear!"

"You do love me; tell me, dear, once more, that you do!"

"More than all this earth and the stars! More than all the other universes beyond this one!" she cried, laughing at her extravagance.

He raised his hand and bade her listen.

"I thought the wind changed awhile ago. The weather spirit's abroad. Let's have a look."

He threw on the porch lights and opened the front door. It was snowing hard; the porch steps and driveway were already covered, and the nearest trees had been transformed into ghostly sentinels. She clapped her hands in delight at the beauty of it.

"It makes me think of 'Snow Bound,' " she said when they had gone back to the fire. "I used to know some of that poem. Little Grace will now recite for you!" She assumed the attitude of a school girl recitationist and repeated, gesturing awkwardly:

'What matter how the night behaved?
What matter how the north-wind raved?
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow
Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow.'

I'm talented; you can see that! What if we should be snowed in?"

"What if we should!" he answered. "Tommy always carries a full larder and we wouldn't starve to death."

With her hands clasped before her she gazed down at the flames. He drew his arm about her waist and the room was silent save for the cosy murmur of the fire.

"Why not stay here all night? Jerry hasn't left and he'll spend the night if I ask him and give us breakfast. I suppose you have to go to the store tomorrow?"

"Yes,—" the assent was to one or all of his questions as he might choose to interpret it.

"We can go in of course, early in the morning. I have a nine o'clock engagement myself."

"They'll be expecting me at home," she said, pondering deeply, "but if I could telephone from here——"

"I think Tommy's connected direct with the city exchange. Jerry can tell us."

He rang for Jerry, who confirmed his impression as to the telephone connection.

Trenton detained the boy to ask for more logs while Grace went to the pantry to telephone.

"Were you going into town tonight, Jerry?"

"No, Mr. Trenton; too complete snowing. I very well stay all night."

"The runabout's in order, is it?"

"Yezzah."

"Miss Durland and I are spending the night. If you could give us breakfast, Jerry?"

"With much ease, Mr. Trenton."

Trenton lit a cigarette and smoked meditatively while Jerry noiselessly filled the wood box. Grace reappeared as Jerry stood awaiting further instructions.

"Oh, Grace, what time shall we say for breakfast?" Trenton asked casually.

"I must be at the store at eight-thirty," she answered from the door.

"Then breakfast at seven? We'd better allow a little extra time in case the snow keeps up. Seven it is, Jerry."

The boy left them and could be heard moving about upstairs. A clock struck ten and Trenton exclaimed at the hour.

"I'd have guessed it wasn't more than eight! The hours do jump along when the heart's light. Any difficulty about not going in?"

"No; not at all. Every one was out but father and I merely said I was at the house of a girl friend and would spend the night there."

She walked to a table and began inspecting the books that were arranged upon it in careful order. It might have seemed that she wished to avoid meeting his eyes immediately. He hesitated a moment then crossed to her quickly.

"It's always interesting to see what books you find in a country house," he said. "But it's a mistake to judge the owner by the literature you find lying about; it's usually the discards of the guests. At the place where I caused so much disappointment by not dying——"

"Oh, please don't say it, even as a joke, Ward!" she pleaded, dropping a book she had opened and laying her hands on his arm.

"Well, I won't then! I was jealous of that book. You were so absorbed I almost felt that I was alone in the room. And I was horribly oppressed by the general vacancy, emptiness, voidness! Now my vanity is touched to find that you hadn't really gone away and left me; you're very much here!"

"You're so foolish!" she said. "What were the books you found in your room at that place where you were ill?"

"Oh, they were on the occult and had been left behind by some enthusiastic spook hunter. After that hour when I so plainly saw you right there by my bed I studied those books carefully. I wanted to explain the transformation of a very plain nurse in spectacles into the most beautiful girl in the world!"

"And,—did you explain it?"

"Yes; but not from the books!"

"How was it then?"

"My heart did the explaining. I knew I loved *you!* That's the answer to all my questions."

"You do love me, Ward, really and truly?"

"Yes, dear," and then with head lifted he added as though repeating a pledge from some ritual: "With all my heart, with all my soul, with every hope of happiness I have for the future, I love you!"

He took her in his arms and held her so that he could look down into her eyes.

"I want to be everything to you; I want to fill your heart so that you will turn to me in every need. I want you, all or nothing!"

Her lips parted tremulously, inviting his kiss. She felt singularly secure and content in his arms.

"All or nothing?" she repeated in a low whisper.

"Yes! There was no escape for us from the beginning," he said slowly. "It's been like a drawing of the tide that no man's hand could stay."

They walked slowly to the hearth, his hands thrust deep into his coat pockets. He eyed the fire critically and rearranged the half-burnt logs.

"Guess I'd better put this up as a precaution," he remarked lifting the wire screen that stood against the wall and laying it against the arch under the mantel. "Run along, dear. I'll see to the locking up."

He went into the hall and snapped on the lights and kissed his hand to her as she started up the steep, old-fashioned stair. The lights were turned on in all the rooms and humming softly she wandered through them, pausing finally in one in which a suitcase lay open on a chair, evidently placed there by

Jerry. She recognized it as Irene's, kept at The Shack for occasions when she spent the night there.

Below, Trenton was testing the fastening of the doors. She lifted her head, listening intently as she heard his step.

III

As she dressed the next morning Grace saw a white world reluctantly disclosing itself in the gray dawn. Trenton was already gone, and hearing the scraping of a shovel she looked out and saw him clearing a path that led to an old barn which Kemp had converted into a garage. Jerry darted out of the kitchen to remonstrate and Trenton ceased from his labors to fling a shovelful of snow at him.

When she went down Trenton met her in the hall, kissed her and led her with mock ceremony to the dining room door.

"Breakfast for two! Something awfully cozy about that table, with the plates so close together!"

"Just perfect! I'd like to take a run through the snow; wouldn't it be jolly! And there's that hill we climbed yesterday that would be a grand place for coasting!"

"No time for that now!" he replied looking at his watch. "There's a good six inches of snow and being out so early we'll have to be pathfinders. It will be about all we can do to hit Washington street by eight-thirty. There's going to be waffles and maple syrup for breakfast. I got that out of Jerry; also bacon and guaranteed eggs."

"The Olympians had nothing on us!" she replied in his own key of gaiety.

"Oh, we are become even as the gods!" he cried, drawing out her chair. "This is a touch—breakfast by candlelight!"

Tall candles in glass holders lighted the table. Grace for a fleeting moment thought of the kitchen at home, where her mother and Ethel were now preparing breakfast, wholly ignorant of her whereabouts. Trenton saw the smile waver and leave her face, and he bent over and laid his hand on hers.

"You know—No! you don't, you can't know what all this means to me! I feel as though I'd been dead and come to life again!"

"Does it mean so much, dear?" she asked, her eyes, intent and searching, meeting his.

"If you look at me like that, dear," he replied, "I'll never be able to finish this grapefruit!" Then with a quick change of tone he asked anxiously:

"You're not unhappy, dear?"

"No; it's just the strangeness of being here; that's all."

"It doesn't seem real to me, either. I'd thought so much of just such an hour as this, facing a new day and a new world with you, that it's hard to believe the dream has really come true!"

"But you'll be going away. There will be lots of times I can't see you. It's going to be hard to get used to that," she said pensively.

"Don't worry on that score. I've got a lot of work laid out for the next year right here in the Middle West. I can easily spend my Sundays in Indianapolis. I'd travel a mighty long way just for a sight of you. Let's make the most of today and not worry about tomorrow. Sufficient unto the day is the happiness thereof!"

She smiled her acquiscence in this philosophy, was again buoyant, and joined with him in praising Jerry as the boy appeared with a plate of fresh waffles.

"I tell you what I'll do!" exclaimed Trenton suddenly. "I'll cut all my engagements for today if you will and we'll stay right here!"

"Oh, it would be wonderful! But I mustn't even think of it! I'd lose my job; and besides, I mustn't forget I have a family. Please don't try to persuade me. But you know I'd love to stay—not just today but forever!"

"I wish you didn't have your job!" he said, frowning. "I don't feel comfortable about that."

"Don't begin telling me I ought to be doing something different! Everybody else does! I really enjoy my work at Shipley's."

"There ought to be some way,—" he began. Something in her look caused him to pause. "I was going to say that I don't like the idea of your working—you must let me—now—"

"Ward!"

"Forgive me, dear," he said contritely.

"I believe in work," she went on quickly. "I mean always to do something; maybe not just what I'm doing now, but—something!"

"When you talk that way I feel as though you didn't expect to belong to me always." He rose and drew her to her feet. "Let's have that understood here and now." He held her away, his hands resting lightly on her cheeks as he looked into her eyes with mock severity. "We've got to be on our way in about two minutes, Miss Durland, and there must be no nonsense about this. Is it for always?"

"Yes, for always," she answered.

"To the very end?"

"Yes, to the very end," she assented soberly, and there was the foreshadowing of tears in her eyes.

"No matter what may happen; no matter if there should be times of separation beyond our control—you will still love me and trust me?"

"Yes—always. There will never be any one else for me but you,—not if I live a thousand years."

She put her arms about his neck and kissed him,—a kiss without passion, on forehead and lips.

"You don't care less for me,—now?" she asked, and pressed her face close to his.

"Grace!" he cried, catching her wrists and looking into her eyes. "You wouldn't think that of me! I'd be a beast——"

She laid her hand over his lips.

"Forgive me, dear," she whispered. "If I didn't trust you I couldn't love you; and I just,—I thought——"

"Dearest little girl!"

IV

The sun came out of the mists as they set off for town with the snow flung up by the rear wheels of the car whirling behind in a miniature storm.

"You're not afraid of a little speed?"

"Not with you!" she answered happily. "Was that the right answer?"

"One hundred per cent correct! Look at the smoke from that farmer's chimney—it goes up as straight as a column. Not a breath of air!"

"It's a dear good old world," she said, her eyes reflecting her enjoyment of the swift rush between the long stretches of white level fields broken by patches of woodland.

"What's the dearest thing in all the world?" he demanded.

"You!" she replied.

"Wrong that time! It's you!"

"I wonder how many lovers have said just that to each other?"

"Thousands—billions, no doubt. But that doesn't matter. It never was as true of the others as it is of us."

"We're not conceited or anything!"

"No; just happy! Honestly and truly, are *you* happy?"

"Enormously! Are you?"

"Right up to the perishing point!"

"Then *why* are you happy?"

"Because the dearest girl in the world loves me!"

They laughed their delight in this interchange, stopped to extricate from its difficulties a car which, unprovided with skid-chains, had landed in a ditch, and hurried on to make up for lost time. It was with a sense of disillusionment that Grace saw the city, as it seemed, coming out to meet her. Trenton was talking of his day's appointments, of the men he expected to see. Grace's thoughts flew ahead to the store, where she would meet Irene—meet her friend with a new self-consciousness—and of the deceptions and evasions that would be necessary to explain her night's absence at home. But these thoughts were fleeting. She was happy in the confidence that the man beside her truly loved her and her love for him, which she had so often challenged and questioned even after she first encouraged him to think she cared, was no longer a matter for debate. She assured herself that there was nothing base in the relationship into which she had entered with him; that the attrac-

tion had been of the mind and spirit first of all. She swiftly reviewed all the points upon which her justification rested, and was satisfied that they stood the test of the morning sunlight and the clean wholesome air. She had no regrets; no misgivings. She had already convinced herself that their love was sufficient in itself. He turned from time to time to smile at her and took her hand that it might rest beneath his on the wheel.

"We haven't settled yet when I'm to see you again. I want every minute you can give. Can't we have dinner together tonight?"

"I wish we could, but I've got to go home for supper."

"But I can see you afterwards,—please!"

"I could go to Miss Lawton's where we met the first time. I think I can fix it with Minnie."

"Then that's settled! I understand perfectly that you have your family to consider and we've got to remember there are people in the world who haven't much to do but pry into other people's business. They're a large and michievous phalanx. For the present we've got to be careful."

She was rather relieved that he did not amplify the suggestive "for the present." He was thinking, she assumed, of his wife and the freedom which he had intimated would be his for the asking. But marriage was no assurance of the perpetuation of love; it was a convention, no doubt desirable and necessary for society's protection; but Grace was in a mood to enjoy her sense of being in rebellion against society, that intangible "they" which, she had brought herself to believe, quite ignorantly established laws and in the light of them appraised and condemned human frailty.

She derived the greatest comfort from this idea; it encouraged and strengthened her belief that she was an independent unit of the social order. If her relationship with Trenton became known she would forfeit the love and confidence of her family and many prized friendships. But his love would be compensation for anything she might lose in the eyes of people she felt to be hopelessly shackled to old notions of rectitude and chastity with which she no longer felt any concern. It would be necessary, of course, to maintain secrecy; but it was no one's business what she did with her life.

"Last chance for a kiss," Trenton exclaimed, slipping his arm about her as they reached the Meridian street bridge.

She asked him to let her out at the soldiers' monument to avoid the possibility of being inspected by questioning eyes at Shipley's. Trenton was going at once to Kemp's house to make sure Tommy was all right; he meant to have it out with Tommy about his drinking.

"Tell your father I'd like to see him tomorrow at two o'clock. Yes; I have the address."

With his good-bye ringing in her ears she walked the few remaining blocks to the store.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

WHEN Grace reached home that evening her absence of the preceding night was barely mentioned by her mother, and Ethel did not refer to it at all. The conduct of another member of the family had aroused grave apprehensions in the domestic circle and any suspected derelictions of her own were suffered to pass, or were accepted in a spirit of resignation, as a part of a visitation of an inscrutable providence upon the house of Durland.

Roy had turned up in the early hours of the morning much the worse for dalliance with a contraband beverage that had served him ill. There was gloom in the kitchen where she found her mother and Ethel preparing supper and after satisfying herself that she was not the cause of the depression she summoned courage to ask her mother what had happened.

"I think, mother," said Ethel loftily, "that Grace should *know*. It may be possible that she can help us in our trouble. Roy has always been fonder of her than of me."

Ethel's tone was replete with intimations that this affection was not wholly complimentary to either her brother or sister. She entered upon a circumstantial account of Roy's misbehavior which omitted nothing that could enhance its heinousness, Mrs. Durland interrupting occasionally to soften the harsh terms in which Ethel described Roy's appearance on the snowy threshold at two o'clock, in the care of two young friends in little better condition than himself. It had

been necessary to summon a doctor to relieve Roy's stomach of the poison he had consumed.

"I'm sure it's the first and last time for Roy," said Mrs. Durland. "He's terribly cut up over it; but of course at the holiday season, and meeting old friends and all, I suppose we must make allowances."

"That's the way to look at it, mother," said Grace, sincerely grieved for her mother and anxious to restore her confidence in Roy. "I know Roy wouldn't do anything to trouble you. We ought to be glad that stuff didn't kill him! Roy isn't the only boy who thinks it smart to drink now that it's forbidden. I hear a lot about that, down-town."

"I suppose you do," said Mrs. Durland, catching hopefully at the suggestion that her boy was not the only wanderer in the path that leads to destruction.

"Roy knows our hopes are centered in him; there's not the slightest excuse for his conduct!" Ethel resumed, unwilling that Roy's sin should be covered up in charitable generalizations. "Instead of running around with a lot of dissolute young men he ought to be making friends who can help him get a start in life. As for prohibition, it's the law of the land and you'd think a young man who's studying law would respect it. Only the other day Osgood gave me an article with statistics showing what's being done to enforce the law and it will only be a short time until the rum power is completely vanquished."

"It's dying mighty hard," remarked Grace cheerfully. "Anybody can get whiskey who has the price."

"One would think—" began Ethel, moved at once to give battle.

"Oh, I'm not hankering for it myself," Grace interrupted. "But they ought to enforce the law or repeal it. I'm only saying what everybody knows."

"Well, of course, Grace, we don't know just *who* your friends are," Ethel retorted.

"Oh, they probably wouldn't amuse you even if you knew them!" Grace flung back.

Whereupon Mrs. Durland, who was arranging a tray with coffee and toast to carry up to Roy, announced that enough had been said on the subject.

II

Trenton's week in town lengthened to ten days. Minnie Lawton's apartment proved to be a convenient meeting place, and on two evenings Grace and Trenton dined there alone, with Jerry to serve them. Trenton had persuaded Kemp to go to a hospital for rest and observation. The reports of the local physician merely confirmed what the New York specialist had told Trenton as to his friend's condition. Trenton took Irene and Grace to the hospital to see Kemp one evening. They found him looking a little thin and white but he greeted them joyfully. He wasn't wholly cut off from civilization in spite of their efforts to get rid of him, he said, pointing gleefully to a telephone at his bedside which he had obtained as a special concession. He boasted that he could lie in bed and direct his business affairs almost as well as at his office.

"But the nurses won't flirt with me," he complained, "and you girls showed up just in time to keep me from passing up your whole unaccountable sex. I've got to be amused even if I am locked up here with fourteen disagreeable things being done to me every day. The purpose of woman is to amuse."

"There you go, Tommy! Women are divided into two classes," said Irene in her spacious manner, "those

who amuse their husbands and those who amuse other women's husbands. It's not for me to say to which variety, subdivision or group I prefer to belong."

Trenton had visited Stephen Durland twice at his shop in the Power Building and at the hospital he mentioned the matter of Durland's improvements on the Cummings-Durland motor. The issuance of the patents to Durland had brought inquiries from several Eastern manufacturers and the representative of one concern had opened negotiations for an option.

"Look here, Grace," said Kemp when Trenton had explained concisely the nature of the improvements, "I'm going to be mighty sore if you let this escape before I have a look at it. Go on, Ward, and tell me more about it."

"You father must have something good," said Irene, who had listened attentively to the talk, "for I don't understand a word of it. I hope there's millions in it."

"That new composition Mr. Durland's working on for non-cracking spark-plug porcelains will be worth something handsome if it's as good as it promises to be," Trenton remarked. Kemp's alert curiosity had to be satisfied as to the nature of the substance Durland was working on and Trenton went into the chemistry of the composition and said it would have to be subjected to more exacting tests.

"We'll test that at my plant too," said Kemp, "but the sooner we get to work on the motor the better. We'll give Mr. Durland a corner in my shop, and all the help he needs; I'll call up the superintendent in the morning and explain what's wanted."

"It's all too good to be true!" said Grace. "Father's such a dear, patient, gentle soul and to land something now will mean more than you can understand. Thank you so much, Tommy."

She walked to the bed and took Kemp's hand.

"I suppose your father would rather Cummings had the new features for the engine," he said drily.

"Gracious heavens, no!" Grace exclaimed. "Father would cheerfully die in the poor house before he'd let Cummings have anything of his."

"That's the spirit! Ward, don't be stingy with Mr. Durland. Double whatever anybody else offers for an option on the motor improvements and we'll hope it's only the beginning."

III

Stephen Durland discussed with Grace everything pertaining to his new connection with the Kemp concern. He had made so many mistakes in his life that he didn't want to risk making any more, he said pathetically at a noon hour which Grace spent with him after he had agreed to the terms Kemp had proposed through Trenton.

"A thousand dollars just for an option looks mighty big," he said. "I never expected to see that much money again. And I'm to draw two hundred a month from the Kemp Company while I'm building a motor out there. It's pretty nice, Grace."

He wanted to give her the thousand dollars and any income he might derive from the improved motor as compensation for what he felt was the wrong she had suffered through his inability to keep her in college. He was greatly in earnest about this and showed his affection for her in a shy gentle fashion that touched her deeply. She laughed him into accepting her rejection of his offer and overruled his decision not to tell his wife and Ethel of his brightening prospects. The motor might not stand up under the tests,

he said, and he wished to avoid the necessity of confessing a fresh failure.

"Don't be afraid; I'll see that you don't get scolded! You just strut around the house and make the most of your success—for that's what it is! Mr. Trenton told me he was sure your improvements were enormously important—greater efficiency, greater economy of operation and every other little old thing you've thought up in that dear bean of yours!"

"Trenton's a fine man. He's been mighty nice to me," said Durland. "It's a pleasure to talk to a man who catches an idea so quick. I guess Kemp does pretty much what he says. I don't know Kemp. I never thought of it till after the break, but Cummings never wanted me to meet other manufacturers in our line. Guess he didn't trust me," he ended with a grim smile. "Afraid I might get away from him before he was sure I'd petered out."

"He guessed wrong, daddy! We'll let Cummings do the worrying now."

On the day he closed his shop in the Power Building and moved to the experimental room that had been fitted up for him at Kemp's big plant Durland mentioned his new prospects at the supper table. He made the disclosure so slightingly that Mrs. Durland and Ethel, who had been busily discussing the merits of a novel they had been reading and Ethel thought grossly immoral, failed to catch the point of the revelation until he had cleared his throat and announced for a second time that he was moving out to Kemp's to do a little experimenting.

"I guess that's yours, Allie," he remarked, producing the check. "Got it for an option on a patent I've been tinkering at. Trenton, that Pittsburg expert, recommended it to Kemp."

"Trenton?" repeated Ethel, carefully scrutinizing the Kemp Manufacturing Company's check before passing it on to her mother.

"Yes; Ward Trenton," Durland replied with a note of pride that so distinguished an engineer had recognized his merits. "He keeps track of everything that goes through the patent office for clients he's got all over the country. I'm going to build some of my motors at Kemp's; they've given me a lot better place to work in than I used to have at Cummings's, and I'm going to have all the help I want. And I'm to draw two hundred a month while I'm there. I guess that's fair enough."

"This is your friend, Trenton, is it, Grace?" asked Ethel, awed into respect by the size of the check.

"The same," Grace replied, carelessly meeting Ethel's gaze across the table. "He's the kindest man imaginable. You can hardly complain of his treatment of father."

"I've *always* believed in father," said Ethel. "I hope Isaac Cummings will see in this a retribution—God's punishment for the way he treated father."

"Let's not hand out the retribution to Cummings till Kemp's satisfied about the motor," suggested Grace.

"We're all proud of you, Stephen," said Mrs. Durland, smoothing the creases in the check. "I'm writing Roy tonight and I'll tell him the good news. Of course I'll warn him not to speak of it. Your success will be a great incentive to the dear boy. He was so contrite over his behavior while he was home that I'm glad to have this news for him. We should all feel grateful. Something told me when Isaac Cummings turned you out that it was for the best. I'll never again question the ways of Providence. I don't

feel like taking this money, Stephen, but it will come in handy in giving Roy a start."

In the happier spirit that now dominated the home circle Grace's increasingly frequent absences for evenings and occasionally for a night passed with little or no remark.

"You've got to live your life in your own way," Mrs. Durland would say with a sigh when she found Grace leaving the house after supper. "I hardly see you any more."

To guard against awakening in Ethel's mind any suspicion that her evenings away from home coincided with Trenton's presence in town, which her father usually mentioned, Grace made a point of going out at times when Trenton was away. There were always things she could do—entertainments among the Shipley employees, dances, theatre parties of business girls with whom she had become acquainted. These engagements she refrained from describing with any particularity as this would make the more marked her silence on evenings when she went to Minnie Lawton's to meet Trenton. She had adopted a regular formula when she left the house, saying merely, "I'm going out for a little while," which her mother and Ethel had schooled themselves to accept as an adequate explanation of her absences.

Mrs. Bob Cummings looked in on her one day at Shipley's with the promised invitation to dinner, and to go to a club dance afterwards, which Grace refused only because the dramatic club of Shipley employees was giving a play the same night and she had a leading part. And Miss Reynolds dropped in to the ready-to-wear department frequently when she was down town and occasionally asked Grace to dinner.

The mild winter almost imperceptibly gave way be-

fore the blithe heralds of spring and April appeared smiling at the threshold.

No cloud darkened the even course of her affair with Trenton. She was more and more convinced of the depth and sincerity of her love for him and he was the tenderest, the most considerate of lovers. When she did not see him, sometimes for a week or fortnight, his messages floated back with those constant reassurances of his loyalty and affection that are the very food of love. He rarely mentioned his wife in their talks and Grace was no longer a prey to jealousy. She wondered sometimes whether he had ever broached to Mrs. Trenton the matter of the divorce at which he had hinted, but Grace found herself caring little about this one way or another. She exulted in her independence, complacent in the thought that she was a woman of the Twentieth Century, free to use her life as she would.

IV

John Moore had not crossed Grace's vision since the afternoon of Christmas day, when his unexpected appearance in the highway near The Shack proved so disconcerting. She suspected that he was avoiding her, probably from a generous wish to spare her the embarrassment of explaining herself.

When she left Shipley's at the closing hour of a day early in April she was surprised to see him waiting at the door.

"Good evening, Grace! Hope you don't mind being held up, but I wanted to see you and this seemed the easiest way. Got time to walk home?"

Grace had meant to take the car but she decided instantly that in view of the glimpse he had got of

her in Trenton's arms on the memorable day at The Shack it would be poor diplomacy to refuse.

"Of course, I'll walk, John," she replied cordially. "I've been wanting to see you." She waited till they were out of the crowd, then said with a preluding laugh:

"You must be thinking the awfulest things of me, and that's why you've given me the go-by. That was an awful fib I told you Christmas about going to a matinee. The truth of the matter was that I had promised to go with some people into the country for the afternoon and didn't want the family to know; and I couldn't explain over the telephone. And out there we all got to cutting up and well—you saw me! I'm terribly ashamed of myself!"

"Oh, pshaw, you needn't be! I didn't think anything about it. I always know you're all right. I'm for you, Grace—you know that. I've been so busy since I moved to town that I've kept my nose right on the grindstone."

His words lacked the usual John Moore flavor, and in spite of his protest she guiltily attributed his unusual restraint to reservations as to the Christmas day episode. But his next speech quickly shifted the ground of her apprehensions.

"I've just been down to Bloomington to see Roy," he said, doggedly blurting out the sentences. "The boy sent for me; he'd got into a bad scrape—about a girl. You can guess the rest of it."

"Oh!" she gasped, feeling the earth whirling. "Not that!"

"Roy was in a blue funk and threatened to run away but I talked him out of that. The girl's name is Sadie Denton; she's not really a bad girl. I had a talk with her and went down to Louisville with them

yesterday and saw them married. Her folks live there and they'll look out for her till Roy finishes at the law school. I guess that's about all. He didn't want any of you to know about it just yet; but I sat down on that and he agreed I should tell you. I was sure you'd handle it right at home."

"Oh, it will break mother's heart! She's counted everything on Roy."

"Well, everything isn't lost yet," he replied. "I hope you think I did right."

"It was the only thing, of course, John. It was just like you to see it straight and do the right thing."

She wormed from him the fact that he had given Roy a hundred dollars, and that certain payments for the support of Roy's wife had been agreed on.

"You're certainly a friend, John. We'll return the money at once; that's the least we can do."

When he protested that he did not need the money immediately she explained that her father's affairs were looking brighter and that the return of the sum advanced would work no hardship.

The bad news having been delivered, Moore exerted himself to cheer her, but a vast gloom had settled upon her. As he shook hands at the gate her sense of his tolerance, kindness and wisdom brought tears to her eyes but, left alone, her only emotion was one of fury against Roy. She stood on the door-step pondering. Again, as after Roy's appeal for money to cover his share of the expense of his automobile escapade, she thought of her own weakness in yielding to temptation. But for John's advice that it would be better for the rest of the family to know at once of Roy's tragedy—this being the only word that fitly described this new and discouraging blight upon her brother's future—

she would have lacked the courage to communicate the evil tidings to the household.

It was not until they had all settled in the living room after supper that she broke the news. Her father sat at the table, reading a technical journal, with Ethel near by preparing her Sunday-school lesson. Mrs. Durland had established herself by the grate with the family darning in her lap. Since Durland's removal to Kemp's establishment a new cheer and hope had lightened the atmosphere of the home, and Grace, moving restlessly about the room, dreaded to launch her thunderbolt upon the tranquil scene.

"I have something to tell you; please listen,—you too, father," she began quietly.

She used much the same blunt phrases in which Moore had condensed the story, watching with a kind of fascination a long black stocking slip from her mother's hand, pause at her knee and then crawl in a slow serpentine fashion down her apron to her feet.

"Oh, Roy!" Mrs. Durland moaned, her face white.

Mr. Durland coughed, took off his glasses, breathed on the lenses and began slowly rubbing them with the corner of the linen table cover. He desisted suddenly, remembering that Ethel had once rebuked him for mussing the cover.

"I guess that's all there is to say about it," Grace concluded when she had told everything, not omitting their financial obligation to Moore. "We've all got to make the best of it."

Grace picked up the fallen stocking and handed it to her mother, who made a pretense of carefully inspecting a hole in the heel.

"What time's the first train down in the morning?" she asked. "I must see Roy—and——"

Ethel, who had sunk back helplessly in her chair, jumped to her feet, her eyes blazing.

"You shan't go one step mother! It's enough that Roy's brought this disgrace on the family without you going down there to pet him. It's your spoiling him that's made him what he is. John Moore had no business meddling in our affairs. What Roy should have done was to go away and never show his face to any of us again. Father, you tell mother to keep away from Roy!"

The appeal to Durland, who had so rarely found himself a court of last resort in the whole course of his life, was not without its humor and Grace smiled bitterly as she watched her sister, who stood before her, white, her lips set in hard lines, her hands clenched at her sides. Durland cleared his throat and recrossed his legs.

"I guess your mother'll do the right thing, Ethel," he said.

"I think you're all crazy!" Ethel flared. "What will Osgood think of me, with my brother forced to marry a girl off the street."

"I didn't say she was off the street," Grace corrected her. "I'd show the girl a little mercy if I were you, and I wouldn't make it any harder than necessary for father and mother. You're not the only one of us who has feelings."

"I'll leave! The rest of you may do as you please, but I'll not let Osgood think I don't feel the *shame* of my brother's sin."

"If Osgood reads his Testament he may not see it in quite that light."

Ethel breathed hard in the effort to think of some withering retort. The best she could do, however, was not especially brilliant.

"Osgood," she announced grandly, "is a gentleman!"

"He might be that and still be a Christian," Grace replied tartly.

"What did you say about trains, Grace," asked Mrs. Durland, who, deep in thought, had scarcely heard the colloquy between her daughters.

"I'll call the station and find out. And I'll get Irene on the 'phone and tell her I won't be at the store tomorrow. I'm going with you, mother."

"Irene!"

Ethel caught up and flung back the name as though it were some hateful and obscene thing.

"Ethel," said Mrs. Durland serenely, "If you've got nothing better to do you might help me with the darning. I don't like to go away without clearing it up."

V

The visit to Bloomington was not particularly heartening. Roy was in a sullen humor when they talked to him in the hotel parlor. He wanted to drop the law course and go West, and they argued the matter most of the day, Grace alternating between despair at Roy's stubborn indifference to every attempt to arouse his pride and ambition and admiration for her mother's courage and forbearance in the most poignant sorrow of her life.

Grace finally left them together and took a walk that led her far from the campus. She had no heart for looking upon the familiar scenes or meeting the friends she had left there only a few months earlier. When she returned to the hotel Roy had been won to a more tractable humor; and when he left them it was in a spirit of submission, at least, to what he con-

sidered an ungenerous ordering of fate. Mrs. Durland insisted on carrying out the plan, with which she had left Indianapolis, of visiting the young woman who was now her daughter-in-law.

"She's Roy's wife," she said when Grace tried to dissuade her. "I'll feel better to see her. And it's only right I should."

She took the train for Louisville and Grace went home.

Grace's thoughts were given a new direction early the next morning when Miss Beulah Reynolds appeared at Shipley's shortly after the doors were opened.

"My dear child, the most astounding thing has happened!" the little woman declared immediately.

"Your house hasn't burned down!" exclaimed Grace, amused by the little woman's agitation.

"Worse! I'm to have a visitor,—that Mary Graham Trenton whose book we once talked about. I've just had a letter from an old friend in Boston warning me of the lady's approach, and asking me to see the Indians don't get her. I've wired her at Cleveland asking her to stay at my house—I could hardly do less."

"I suppose not," said Grace faintly, wondering why Miss Reynolds had come to her with the news.

"I'm asking some people to dinner the night the lady lectures—Tuesday—and I want you to come. Don't look so scared! She may not be as terrible as she writes but I'm going to invite Dr. Ridgely, and my doctor and my lawyer with the hope that they'll all get a shock. And I want you to come; you've read her stuff, and I'll count on you to help keep the talk going."

"Why, I don't know—" Grace began, her mind in a whirl of conjecture.

"Come! That's a dear child. Don't go back on me; I need your moral support. At six thirty, then? We have to dine early on account of the lecture."

"Why, yes; Miss Reynolds," Grace answered faintly.

"By the little pink ear of Venus!" exclaimed Irene, coming upon Grace just as Miss Reynolds left. "What's Little Old Ready Money done to you?"

"Nothing," Grace replied, her mind still in confusion. "She was just asking me to dinner."

"From your looks I'd have guessed it was a funeral," Irene replied, and Grace, pulling herself together, hurried away to meet an approaching customer.

Of late she had given little thought to Mrs. Trenton, and it had never occurred to her in her wildest dreams that she might meet Ward's wife in the intimate contact of a dinner table. The prospect kept her in a state of excitement all day and at times she was strongly impelled to trump up some excuse for refusing to go to Miss Reynolds's. But her earlier curiosity as to what manner of woman it was who bore Ward Trenton's name was rekindled by the thought of meeting her. Trenton was in Syracuse and might not reach Indianapolis for a week or more. He had said that he had not, in the letter he had written to Mrs. Trenton from St. Louis, revealed the identity of the woman who had so strongly appealed to him. Mrs. Trenton would hardly suspect that a girl she met at a dinner party was the person her husband had described only vaguely and without indicating her habitat.

Grace decided against writing Trenton of the im-

pending meeting till it was over. Having quieted her apprehensions she began dramatizing the scene at Miss Reynolds's table and she reread "Clues to a New Social Order" against the possibility that Mrs. Trenton's book might become a subject of discussion at the dinner. The thought of seeing her lover's wife in this fashion while she herself remained unknown and unsuspected laid powerful hold upon her imagination.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

THE calamity that had befallen Roy cast a shadow upon the Durland household. Ethel stalked about with an insufferable air of outraged innocence. Roy had ruined the family; after all the sacrifices that had been made for him he had flung away his chance and was lost beyond redemption. She was merciless in her denunciation of her brother, and hardly less severe upon her mother for spoiling Roy and condoning his sin.

Grace exerted herself to the utmost to dispel the gloom. Not since her young girlhood had she felt so closely drawn to her mother, and she endeavored by every possible means to lighten her burdens. Mrs. Durland's attempts to make the best of Roy's predicament, even professing to see in what she called the boy's new responsibilities a steadying force that would evoke his best efforts, were pathetic; but Grace encouraged all these hopes though in her heart she was far from optimistic as to her brother's future.

"Sadie isn't really a bad girl," Mrs. Durland had reported on her return from Louisville. Her family are not just what we would have wanted, but they are respectable and we ought to be grateful for that. Her father is employed in the railroad shops and they own their own home. Sadie's an only child and it wasn't necessary for her to go to work, but she was restless and didn't want to stay at home. There's a lot of that spirit among girls these days. Sadie's really fond of Roy and I think she understands that

now she must help him to make a man of himself. She and her mother appreciated our kindness and I think, Ethel, when you see Sadie——"

"When I see Sadie!" cried Ethel, choking at the name. "You don't mean to say you're going to bring her to this house!"

"Not now, of course; she wouldn't want to come. But in time we'll all know her. You must remember Ethel that she's one of the family, your brother's wife, and no matter how much we may regret the whole thing, we've got to stand by her just as we stand by Roy."

"I don't understand you, mother; I don't understand you at all! It isn't like you to pass over a thing like this, that's brought shame and disgrace on the family. And to think—to *think*—" she cried hysterically—"that you even consider bringing the shameless creature here to this house, with all its sacred associations that mean something to me if they don't to the rest of you!"

"That's right, Ethel," said Grace ironically. "It's perfectly grand of you to defend the family altar! I suppose when Sadie comes you'll be for throwing her into the street and stoning her to death. And you'd be the only one who could cast the first stone!"

"Please be quiet, girls," Mrs. Durland pleaded. "It doesn't help any to fuss about things. You haven't taken this as I hoped you would, Ethel. If we don't stand together and help each other the family tie doesn't amount to much. I had hoped you were going to feel better about Roy. We simply mustn't let the dear boy think that just one misstep has ruined his life. We must try to believe that everything is for the best."

"Certainly, mother," said Grace. "That's the only

way to look at it. Ethel doesn't mean to trouble you. She'll come round all right."

Ethel failed to confirm this sanguine prediction. She continued to sulk and when her mother proposed plans for assisting Roy when he finished at the law school she contributed to the discussion only the direst predictions of disaster.

"We all have a lot to be thankful for," Mrs. Durland insisted. "It's a blessing your father's going to be in a position to help Roy. The first year will be the hardest for the boy, but after that he ought to be able to stand on his own feet. I've about decided that it would be better for him to open an office for himself right away and not go in with any one else. The more independent he feels the better. We must see what we can do about that."

"I think we'd better talk it all over with John Moore before we decide about anything," Grace suggested. "He knows all about Roy and certainly has shown himself a good friend."

"John Moore!" sniffed Ethel, who had not forgiven John for meddling in Roy's affairs.

"I hope you love yourself, Ethel; you certainly don't love anybody else." Grace remarked, and added, "Oh, yes, there's Osgood! I forgot that you're concentrating your affections on him."

"I'm not afraid to see him at home; that's more than you do with the men you run around with!"

"Oh, I wouldn't dare introduce my friends to you; you might vamp them away from me!"

"Now girls——!"

Mrs. Durland sighed heavily; Mr. Durland, intent upon some computations he was making at the living room table, stirred uneasily. Grace had not been unmindful of the fact that after his first fortnight at

Kemp's the elation with which he had undertaken his new labors had passed. He was now constructing an engine embodying his improvements on the Cummings-Durland motor and came home at night haggard and preoccupied. He seemed to resent inquiries as to his progress and after the first week Mrs. Durland, on a hint from Grace, ceased troubling him with questions. Grace herself was wondering whether, after all, the ideas that had attracted Trenton's attention in her father's patent claims might not fail to realize what was hoped of them. But her faith in Trenton's judgment was boundless; with his long experience it was hardly possible that he could be deceived or that he would encourage expectations that might not be realized by the most exacting tests.

Grace had not changed her mind about going to Miss Reynolds's dinner, though at times she had all but reconsidered her decision not to tell Trenton of the invitation. There was really no reason why she should not let him know of his wife's impending visit to Indianapolis; what really stayed her hand when she considered mentioning the matter in one of her letters was a fear that he might advise her against going. Her curiosity as to Ward Trenton's wife was acute and outweighed any fear of his possible displeasure when he learned—and of course Grace meant to tell him—that she had deliberately put herself in Mrs. Trenton's way.

II

On Saturday evening the delivery of a gown she had picked out of Shipley's stock to wear to the dinner made it necessary to explain why she had purchased it. It was the simplest of dinner gowns which she

drew from the box and held up for her mother's and Ethel's inspection.

"What earthly use can you have for that, Grace?" Ethel demanded.

Grace laid it across her mother's knees and Mrs. Durland took a fold in her fingers to appraise the material.

"It's certainly pretty. This is one of the new shades, isn't it, Grace? It isn't blue exactly——"

"They call it hydrangea blue, mother. Please hurry and say I'll look scrumptious in it!"

"I don't think I'd have chosen just *that,*" remarked Ethel putting down a handkerchief she was embroidering, in flourishing script with the initials O. H., to eye the garment critically. "If I were in your place and could afford to spend what that must have cost I think I'd have got something in one of the more definite shades. You can't really say whether that's blue or pink."

"That's the artistic part of it, old dear," replied Grace amiably. "It's out of the new spring stock and considered very smart. Wake up, daddy! Tell me you don't think I'm stung!"

"I guess my views about dresses wouldn't help you much, Grace," Durland remarked, glancing at the gown absently and returning to his interminable calculations.

"You'll look sweet in it, Grace," Mrs. Durland volunteered. "You think it isn't cut too low?"

"It's the very latest model, mother. I don't believe you'll think it too low when you see me in it. I tried it on at my lunch hour yesterday and a customer got her eye on it and did her best to coax me to let her have it. But I sold her another gown that cost twenty dollars more, so Shipley's didn't lose anything."

"You get so many clothes, Grace," Ethel interrupted again intent upon her embroidery. "I don't just see what you can want with a dress like that."

"Oh, this is for a special occasion. Miss Reynolds has asked me to dinner Tuesday. She's entertaining for Mrs. Mary Graham Trenton, who's to lecture here that night."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Mrs. Durland. "I read in the paper that Mrs. Trenton was to speak here. I'd never have thought of connecting her with Miss Reynolds!"

"They've never met, I think. A friend of Miss Reynolds's in Boston wrote and asked her to see that Mrs. Trenton was properly looked after, so she's putting her up and pulling off a dinner in her honor. I might say that she didn't appear to be awfully keen about it. She's asking Dr. Ridgely and Judge Sanders and Dr. Loomis with their ladies, so theology, law and medicine will be represented. She asked me, I suppose, because I happened to mention to her once that I had read Mrs. Trenton's 'Clues to a New Social Order.' And it may be in her mind that as a poor working girl I represent the proletariat."

"She may have thought that being a friend of Mr. Trenton's it would be pleasant for Mrs. Trenton to meet you," said Ethel sweetly.

"Thank you, sister, you're certainly the little mind reader," Grace replied.

"I'm sure it's very kind of Miss Reynolds to ask you," remarked Mrs. Durland hastily, fearing a clash between the sisters. "There are no finer people in town than the Sanders and I have always heard splendid things about Dr. Loomis and his wife. It's a privilege to meet people like that. I hope you realize that a woman of Miss Reynolds's position can have

her pick of the town. She's certainly paying you a great compliment, Grace."

"I don't understand Miss Reynolds at all," said Ethel. "She's the last woman in the world you'd think would take a creature like Mary Graham Trenton into her house."

"It's because she is Miss Reynolds that she can do as she pleases," replied Mrs. Durland conciliatingly. "And as she was asked by a friend to show some courtesy to Mrs. Trenton, she isn't doing any more than any one else would do in the same circumstances. As I said when Grace first spoke of meeting Mr. Trenton, his wife's a dangerous woman. It's in her power to do a great deal of mischief in the world. I don't believe Miss Reynolds has any patience with Mrs. Trenton's ideas, and it can't do Grace any harm to meet her. You ought to be glad, Ethel, that Miss Reynolds feels that Grace would fit into a select party like that."

"I'll be surprised if Dr. Ridgely goes to the dinner," replied Ethel. "That woman is fighting everything the church stands for. If I had my way she wouldn't be allowed to speak here."

"That's no joke!" replied Grace good-naturedly. "But there are people, you know, who are not afraid of hearing radical ideas—a few broad-minded people who think it safer to let the cranks talk out in the open than to drive them into a cellar to touch off the gentle bomb."

"Many people feel just that way, Ethel," said Mrs. Durland.

Mrs. Durland's disapproval of Mrs. Trenton and the ideas identified with that lady's name was much softened by the fact that Grace was to be included in a formal dinner which Miss Reynolds had undoubtedly

arranged with care. And while Mary Graham Trenton might entertain and preach the most shocking ideas she was nevertheless one of the best known and most discussed women in America, besides being the inheritor of wealth and social position. Miss Reynolds's marked liking for Grace afforded Mrs. Durland a satisfaction not wholly attributable to veneration for Miss Reynolds's money or unassailable position as a member of a pioneer Indianapolis family. Grace's unaccountable ways and her assertions of independence often brought alarm and dismay to the mother's heart; but Grace was indubitably lovely to look at and the fine spirit in which she had accepted and met the curtailment of her course at the university excused many things. Grace had wits and she would go far, but the traveling would have to be on broad highways of her own choosing. It was not without twinges of heartache that Mrs. Durland realized that this dark-eyed daughter was peculiarly a child of the new order; that not by prayer, threat or cajolery could she be made to walk in old paths or heed the old admonitions. But there had been Morleys who were independent and forthright and Miss Reynolds's invitation implied a recognition of Grace as a well-bred and intelligent girl.

Mrs. Durland, busily sewing, had been giving Grace such information as she possessed about the Sanderses, who were to be of Miss Reynolds's company. Hardly less than the sons and daughters of Virginia and Kentucky, Mrs. Durland was possessed of a vast amount of lore touching the families of her native state. Mrs. Sanders was a Shelton of the old Bartholomew County family of that name. Some Shelton had once been engaged in business with a Morley who was a second cousin of Mrs. Durland. It was a tannery she thought,

though it might have been a brickyard. And Sanders's father had been a prominent citizen somewhere on the lower Wabash and had married into the Alston family of Vanderburgh County. Grace lent a sympathetic ear to this recital of ancient Hoosier history chiefly because her mother found so great a pleasure in reciting it. It was the cruelest of ironies that her mother, with all her adoration of the State and its traditions and her constant recurrence to the past glories of the Morleys, lived a life of self-denial apart from contemporaries capable of sharing her pride and pleasure in the old times.

The talk had wandered far from Grace's dinner engagement when Ethel, who had been quietly plying her needle, took advantage of a lull to switch it back.

"I suppose you won't feel *quite* like a stranger with Mrs. Trenton," she suggested. "Mr. Trenton has no doubt told his wife of his acquaintance with you."

"No doubt he has," Grace replied calmly. "In fact he told me he had written her about me."

This was not wholly candid; Trenton had only said that he had written to his wife, pursuant to an understanding between them, that he had met a girl who greatly interested him. But Ethel's remark occasioned Grace a moment of discomfort. In her last meeting with Trenton his wife had not been mentioned, but it was possible that by now he had made a complete confession of his unfaithfulness. Irene Kirby had frequently commented upon Trenton's frankness; Grace chilled at the thought that he might already have told his story to Mrs. Trenton in the hope of hastening the day of his freedom.

The newspapers were devoting much space to Mrs. Trenton's impending visit. On Saturday and Sunday her portrait adorned the society pages, accompanied by

sketches of her life and activities in the feminist cause that did full justice to her distinguished ancestry and high social connections. In the Durland home Mrs. Trenton continued to be a fruitful subject of discussion. There were things which Ethel thought should be said to Mrs. Trenton. She even considered asking Dr. Ridgely to say them,—a proposition which Grace derided and Mrs. Durland did not encourage. Ethel was further inspired with the idea that a committee of the best women of the city should wait upon Mrs. Trenton and try to convince her of the dangerous character of the doctrines she was advocating.

"You're taking it altogether too seriously," said Grace. "I don't suppose that woman's ever made a single convert. About so many people have always held her ideas—about marriage and things like that. The real radicals probably look on her as a huge joke. A woman who visits at Newport and goes cruising on yachts doesn't just put herself clear outside the social breastworks. There are other women besides Mrs. Trenton who talk free love and birth control and things like that just for the excitement and the attention they get."

"They should be locked up, every one of them!" Ethel declared. "I'm ashamed for our city that she can come here and be received by people you'd expect better things of, and be allowed to speak. The police should stop it!"

"Well, she can't ruin the town with one lecture," Grace replied good-naturedly. "The Twentieth Century Club brings all sorts of lunatics here and the members are about the most conservative people in town. You couldn't change the minds of any of them any more than you could knock over the soldiers' monument with a feather duster."

III

Grace got excused from the store at five o'clock on Tuesday to give herself ample time to prepare for the dinner.

"That's the prettiest gown you ever wore, dear," Mrs. Durland exclaimed when Grace was fully arrayed. "I'm glad you didn't have your hair marcelled; that little natural wave is prettier than anything the hairdresser could do. Carried straight away from your forehead as you've got it gives just the right effect. I guess Miss Reynolds needn't be ashamed of you. You've got the look of breeding, Grace; nobody could fail to see that. Just be careful not to talk too much, not even if Mrs. Trenton says brash things you feel like disputing with her. And if you get a chance to speak to Judge Sanders without appearing to drag it in you might say you're the great-granddaughter of Josiah B. Morley. Little things like that do count, you know."

"Yes, of course," Grace assented, as she studied the hang of her skirt before the mirror.

Ethel came in and seated herself on the bed to watch Grace's preparations. Osgood Haley had walked home with her and she was in the mood of subdued exaltation to which the young man's company frequently brought her. She apologized to her mother for being late; she and Osgood had prolonged the walk by taking a turn in the park but she would make up to her for the delay by doing all of the supper work.

"That dress really is becoming to you, Grace," she said in a fervor of magnanimity. "It sets you off beautifully. You must tell us all about the party. I hope you won't let anything I said about Mrs. Trenton

spoil the evening for you. You know I'm always glad when any happiness comes to you."

"Thank you, Ethel; I guess I'll live through the ordeal," said Grace from her dressing table where she had seated herself to administer the final touches to her toilet. Zealous to be of service, Ethel and her mother watched her attentively, offering suggestions to which Grace in her absorption murmured replies or ignored. Ethel brought from her room a prized lace-bordered handkerchief which she insisted that Grace should carry. Her generosity was spoiled somewhat by the self-sacrificing air with which it was tendered. To help others was really the great joy of life, Ethel quoted Haley as saying, adding that she constantly marveled at Osgood's clear vision of the true way of life. Grace accepted the handkerchief, with difficulty concealing a smile at the change in Ethel wrought by Haley's talk.

The car Miss Reynolds had sent was at the door and Mrs. Durland and Ethel went down to see Grace off. They gave her a final looking over before helping her into her coat. The veil she had drawn over her head required readjustment; it was a serious question whether there was not an infinitesimal spot on one of her slippers.

"Oh, they've got to take me as I am!" said Grace, finally. "There isn't time to dress all over again."

"I'll wait up for you, dear," said Mrs. Durland. "I'll be anxious to know all about the dinner."

Grace was again torn by doubts as the car bore her swiftly toward Miss Reynolds's. She tried to convince herself that she was not in the least interested in Mrs. Trenton; that she was no more concerned with her than she would have been with any other woman she might meet in the house of a friend. But these at-

tempts to minimize her curiosity as to Trenton's wife failed miserably. It was impossible to think of the meeting with her lover's wife as a trifling incident. The newspaper portraits of Mrs. Trenton rose vividly before her and added to her discomfort. She feared that she might in some way betray herself. When the car stopped she felt strongly impelled to postpone her entrance in the hope of quieting herself by walking round the block; but to be late to a dinner was, she knew, an unpardonable sin. Summoning all her courage she ran up the walk to the door, which opened before she could ring.

"First room to the right upstairs," said the colored butler.

The white maid helped her off with her wrap and stood by watching her with frank admiration as she surveyed herself before a long mirror. In Grace's perturbed state of mind the presence of the girl was a comfort.

"Do I look all right?" she asked.

"You look lovely, Miss; just like a beautiful picture."

"Oh, thank you!" said Grace, smiling gratefully into the girl's eyes. "Am I very late?"

"No, Miss, Dr. and Mrs. Ridgely haven't come yet."

A clock on the mantle began striking the half hour as Grace left the room. She went down slowly with a curious sense of being an unbidden guest in a strange house.

From the stair she caught a glimpse of a man in evening dress in the room below. She had attended few functions in her life where men wore evening dress and the staring expanse of shirt front intensified her sense of breathing an alien atmosphere.

As she stood in the drawing room doorway the figures within dimmed and she put out her hand to steady herself. Then the wavering mists that blurred her vision cleared as Miss Reynolds came quickly forward and caught her hands.

"My dear child, I didn't hear you come down! I'm glad to see you,—even relieved!" she added in a whisper. "How perfectly adorable you are!" Grace had not dared lift her eyes to the group of guests who stood across the room talking animatedly, and as Miss Reynolds, with her arm about Grace's waist, moved toward them she was arrested by a young man who had just entered and stood waiting to present himself.

"Oh, Mr. Atwood! Miss Durland, Mr. Atwood." Jimmie Atwood put out his hand, smiling joyfully.

"Good luck, I call this! It's perfectly bully to meet you again, Miss Durland."

"You two are acquainted?" Miss Reynolds exclaimed delightedly. "That's splendid, for you're to take Miss Durland in."

"Mr. Atwood's equal to the most difficult situations," said Grace, meeting his eyes, which were responding to the mirth in her own as both recalled the night they had met at McGovern's.

"Ah! You have a secret of some kind!" said Miss Reynolds. "Far be it from me to intrude but you've got to meet the other guests."

Jimmie Atwood's appearance had lessened the tension for Grace and quite composedly she found herself confronting a tall slender woman who stepped forward to meet the newcomers.

"Mrs. Trenton, Miss Durland—and Mr. Atwood."

Mrs. Trenton gave each a quick little nod, murmuring:

"I'm very glad, indeed."

The Ridgelys at this moment arrived followed by two unattached men. Townsend, a young physician who was looked upon as a coming man, and Professor Grayling, whose courses in sociology Grace had taken at the University. He was, she learned, a remote connection of Miss Reynolds's and had been summoned from Bloomington to add to the representative character of the company.

"Why didn't you ever tell me you knew Miss Reynolds?" Grayling demanded, as he and Grace were left to themselves for a moment during the progress of further introductions.

"Oh, I didn't meet her till after I left college. I know why you're invited; you're here to do the heavy high-brow work! I remember that you once expressed views on the writings of the guest of honor."

"Did I? If I become quarrelsome tonight throw a plate or something at me." Grace had always admired Grayling; he was saying now that she had been his star student and that he missed her from his classes.

"I'd really counted on making you an instructor in my department but you left without saying good-bye; and here I find you launched upon a high social career—it's a distinct loss to social science!"

"If you knew just where and how I met Miss Reynolds you wouldn't think me in danger of becoming a social butterfly!" laughed Grace, her assurance mounting. Grayling was smiling quizzically into her eyes; he would never know how grateful she was for these few minutes with him. The rest of the company were grouped about Mrs. Trenton, who had lately been in Washington and was expressing her

opinions, which were not apparently complimentary, of the public men she had met there.

"I'm Number Eighteen at Shipley's," said Grace, finding that Grayling was giving her his complete attention. "Miss Reynolds was my first customer."

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "You're collecting data! I see it all! There will be a treatise, perhaps a large tome, on your experiences in the haunts of trade. Perhaps you'll allow me to write the preface. We thought down at the University you'd got tired of us, but I see that you'd grown beyond our feeble aid. I'm infinitely relieved!"

"Stop kidding me!" said Grace, glancing about to make sure they were not overheard. "I'm a shop girl, trying to earn an honest living."

Atwood came up as dinner was announced and when they reached the table Grace found that Grayling was to sit at her left. Mrs. Trenton's place was a little to her right on the further side, an arrangement that made it possible for Grace to observe her without falling within the direct line of her vision.

Grace, turning to Atwood, who frankly declared his purpose to monopolize her, found it possible to study at leisure the woman about whom she had so constantly speculated. Mrs. Trenton was, she surmised, nearly the forty years to which Trenton himself confessed and there was in her large gray-blue eyes something of the look of weariness to be found in the eyes of people who live upon excitement and sensation. Her hair had a reddish tinge and the gray had begun to show in it. She bore every mark which to a sophisticated feminine inspection announces that a woman has a particular care for her appearance. She gave an impression of smoothness and finish. She wore a string of pearls and on her left hand a large

pearl set in diamonds, but no wedding ring, a fact which Grace interpreted as signifying that in this fashion the author of "Clues to a New Social Order," let the world know her indifference to the traditional symbol by which womankind advertise their married state. She found herself wondering whether Ward Trenton had given his wife the necklace or the ring with the diamond-encircled pearl. Mrs. Trenton's gown had the metropolitan accent; it was the product unmistakably of one of those ultra smart New York dressmakers whose advertisements Grace had noted from time to time in magazines for women.

Mrs. Trenton had entered into a discussion with Dr. Ridgely of the industrial conditions created by the war; and she was repeating what some diplomat had said to her at a dinner in Washington. Her head and shoulders moved almost constantly as she talked, and her hands seemed never idle, playing with her beads or fingering a spoon she had unconsciously chosen as a plaything. She laughed frequently, a quick, nervous, mirthless little laugh, while her eyes stared vacantly, as though she were not fully conscious of what she said or what was being said to her. She spoke crisply, with the effect of biting off her words. Grace was interested in her mastery of the broad *a*, which western folk profess to scorn but nevertheless envy in pilgrims from the fabled East. Her voice and enunciation reminded Grace of the speech an English woman who had once lectured at the University.

"Oh, that!"

This was evidently a pet expression, uttered with a shrug and a lifting of the brows. It meant much or nothing as the hearer chose to take it. Grace had read much about the neurotic American woman and Mrs. Trenton undoubtedly expressed the type. It was

difficult to think of her as Ward Trenton's wife. The two were irreconcilably different. Grace's mind wearied in the attempt to correlate them, but she gained ease as the moments sped by. By the time the meat course was served the talk had become general. Everyone wished to hear Mrs. Trenton and she met in a fashion of her own the questions that were directed at her. Evidently she was used to being questioned and she answered indifferently, some times disdainfully, or turned the question upon the inquirer.

Atwood was exerting himself to hold Grace's attention. He had never heard of Mary Graham Trenton till Miss Reynolds's invitation sent him to the newspapers for information. He was not sure now that he knew just how she came to be a celebrity and with Grace beside him he didn't care.

"I've been wild to see you ever since that night we put on the little sketch at Mac's," he said confidingly. "You were perfectly grand; never saw a finer piece of good sportsmanship. I met Evelyn the next day and we've talked about it ever since when we've been alone. But old Bob is certainly sore! He's really a good fellow, you know; but he was off his game that night. You scored big with Evelyn. She was really hurt when you refused her invitation to dinner. I was to be in the party—begged for an invitation; I swear I did! Please let me pull a party pretty soon—say at the Country Club, and ask the Cummingses. Really I'm respectable! I've got regular parents and aunts and everything."

"We'll have to consider that. Please listen; this is growing interesting."

"My point, Mrs. Trenton," Professor Grayling was saying, "is just this: Your reform programme only touches the top of the social structure without regard

to the foundation and the intermediate framework. In your 'Clues to a New Social Order' you consider how things might be—a happy state of things if the transition could be effected suddenly. Granting that what you would accomplish is desirable or essential to the general happiness of mankind, we can't just pick out the few things we are particularly interested in and set them up alone. They'd be sure to topple over."

"Oh, that!" Mrs. Trenton replied; and then as though aware that something more was expected of her she went on: "But a lot of changes have come in—in what you scientific economists would call the less important things. Just now I'm laying stress on an equal wage for men and women for the same labor. That I think more important than such things as more liberal divorce laws, though I favor both. As to divorce"—she gave her characteristic shrug,—"we all know that more liberal laws came as the result of changing conditions—the new attitude toward marriage and all that. We're in the midst of a tremendous social evolution."

"May I come in right here for a moment, Mrs. Trenton?" asked Dr. Ridgely. "You plead in your book for a change of existing laws to make marriage dissoluble at the will or whim of the contracting parties; children to be turned over to the State—a direct blow at the family. Do you really think that desirable?" he ended smilingly.

"Dear me! That idea didn't originate with me," she replied. "I merely went into it a little more concretely perhaps."

Again, her curious vacant stare, followed in an instant by a gesture, the slightest lifting and closing of one of her graceful hands as though her thoughts,

having ranged infinity, had brought back something it was not necessary in her immediate surroundings to disclose.

"But," the minister insisted, "would such a solution be wise? Do you, honestly, think it desirable?"

"It's coming; it's inevitable!" she answered quickly.

"How many women can you imagine driving up to a big barracks and checking their babies? How strong *is* the maternal instinct?" asked Judge Sanders.

"Most mothers don't know how to care for their children," said Mrs. Trenton, bending forward to glance at the speaker. Sanders was a big man with a great shock of iron-gray hair. He was regarding Mrs. Trenton with the bland smile that witnesses always found disconcerting.

"Well, that may be true," he said, "but the poor old human race has survived their ignorance a mighty long time."

The laughter at this retort was scattering and tempered by the obvious fact that Mrs. Trenton was not wholly pleased by it.

Jimmie Atwood was hoping that there would be a row. A row among high-brows would be something to talk about when he went to the University Club the next day for lunch and an afternoon of sniff.

"The idea is, I take it," he said with his funny squeak, "that there would be no aunts or in-laws; just plain absolute freedom for everybody. Large marble orphan asylums all over the country. Spanking machines and everything scientific!"

"You've got exactly the right idea," cried Mrs. Trenton.

"Clubs for women and clubs for men; everybody would live in a club. That *would* be jolly!" Atwood

continued, delighted that he had gained the attention of the guest of honor.

"Has anybody here," began Grayling, "ever watched a bunch of college boys listening to a phonograph record of Patti singing 'Home, Sweet Home?' Well, I have and you could cut the gloom with a knife. Home is still sweet to most of us."

"I'd be awfully sorry to miss the weddings we have at the parsonage," said Mrs. Ridgely;—"trusting young souls who pop in at all hours to be married. They're all *sure* they're going to live happy forever after. Miss Durland, it's your generation that's got to solve the problem. Maybe you have the answer."

"Oh, I think weddings are *beautiful!*" Grace answered, feeling the eyes of the company upon her. The girlish ardor she threw into her words won her a laugh of sympathy.

"Don't let them intimidate you," said Mrs. Trenton with an indulgent smile. "Miss Reynolds has been telling me that you're a University girl and you ought to be sound on the great questions if Professor Grayling hasn't spoiled you!"

"No one could spoil Grace," Grayling protested.

Grace pondered, anxious for Miss Reynolds's sake to say nothing stupid. She was the youngest member of the company; they were merely trying in a friendly spirit to bring her into the talk and no wise deliverance would be expected of her.

"I wouldn't dare speak for all my generation," she said, "but something *has* occurred to me. Our elders scold us too much! It isn't at all pleasant to be told that we're terribly wicked; that we haven't any of the fine qualities of our parents and grandparents. We hear nothing except how times have

changed; well, we didn't change them! I positively refuse to be held responsible for changing anything! I took the world just as I found it."

She had spoken quickly, with the ring of honest protest in her voice, and she was abashed when Judge Sanders clapped his hands in approval.

"That's the truest word I've heard on that subject," he said heartily. "The responsibility is on us old folks if our children are not orderly, disciplined, useful members of society."

"I'm afraid you're right," added Dr. Ridgely.

"Aren't you the Miss Durland that John Moore talks about?" Mrs. Sanders asked. "I thought so! Isn't John a wonderful fellow? Since he went into Mr. Sanders's office we've seen him a good deal at our house. He's so simple and honest and gives promise of great things."

"I'm very stupid," said Sanders; "I didn't realize that I had met the paragon Moore brags about so much; but I might have known it!"

He began describing Moore, and told the whole table how, as trustee of the University, he had become acquainted with the young man and was so struck by his fine qualities that he had taken him into his office. He related some of the familiar anecdotes of Moore and called upon Grace for others. Grace told her stories well, wholly forgetting herself in her enthusiasm. Suddenly her gaze fell upon Mrs. Trenton, whose lips were parted in a smile of well-bred inattention. Grace became confused, stammered, cut short a story she was telling illustrative of John's kindness to a negro student whom he had nursed through a long illness. Apparently neither John nor his philanthropic impulses interested the author of "Clues to a New Social Order"; or she was irritated at being obliged to re-

linquish first place at the table. Miss Reynolds, quick to note the bored look on her guest's face, tactfully brought her again into the foreground. Grace was startled a moment later, when, as the talk again became general, Sanders remarked:

"I believe I've met your husband, Mrs. Trenton. He's a friend of Mr. Thomas Kemp, one of our principal manufacturers."

"Yes?" she replied carelessly. "I think I've heard Mr. Trenton speak of an Indianapolis client of that name. He visits your city I know, on professional employments. Indeed his business keeps him in motion most of the time; but I can't complain; I'm a good deal of a gad-about myself! I wired for Mr. Trenton's address to his New York office the other day, hoping I might be able to see him somewhere. It's possible he may turn up here. There's a case for you, Dr. Ridgely! The reason my marriage is so successful is because of the broad freedom Mr. Trenton and I allow each other. We haven't met since—Heaven knows when!"

A slight hint of bravado in her tone suggested an anxiety to establish herself in the minds of the company as the possessor of a wider freedom and a nobler tolerance than other wives. The other wives at the table were obviously embarrassed if not displeased by her declaration. It seemed to Grace that the air of the room chilled preceptibly.

She found herself resenting Mrs. Trenton's manner of speaking of her husband. Trenton, she remembered, had always spoken of his wife in kind terms. On the evening of their first meeting at The Shack he had chivalrously taken upon himself the responsibility for the failure of his marriage. He had spoken of Mrs. Trenton as a charming woman, but Grace

thought her singularly charmless. She was at no pains to make herself agreeable to the company Miss Reynolds had assembled in her honor. One thing was clear and Grace derived a deep satisfaction from the reflection,—Mrs. Trenton not only didn't love her husband, but she was incapable of loving any one but herself. Grace, having accepted the invitation to meet Mrs. Trenton with a sense that there was something a little brazen in her going when Miss Reynolds believed her to be a clean-hearted, high-minded girl, in bitterness of spirit yielded to a mood of defiance. This woman had no right to be a burden and a hindrance to the man she had married. It was her fault if he found in another the love and the companionship she had denied or was incapable of giving him.

IV

The Twentieth Century Club had made the occasion a guest night and the hall was well filled when Miss Reynolds's party arrived. Places had been reserved for them near the platform but Grace slipped into a seat by the door with Atwood and Grayling.

"Thank you for this!" exclaimed Atwood. "I always sleep at lectures and I won't be so conspicuous back here."

Mrs. Trenton, introduced by the president as one of the foremost women of her time, laid a sheaf of notes on the reading desk and began her address. Her subject was "Woman's New Freedom," and she summarized the long struggle for suffrage before indicating the questions to which women should now devote themselves to complete their victory. She recited the familiar arguments against child labor and thought

existing laws should be extended and strengthened; and she pleaded for equal pay for equal work for women. She advocated uniform marriage and divorce laws on a basis of the widest freedom. There was no slavery so hideous as that of marriages where the tie becomes irksome. She favored birth control on the ground that a woman is entitled to be the judge of her fitness and ability to bear and raise children. She advocated state maternity hospitals with provision for the care of all children by the state where parents lack the means or the intelligence to rear them. She was not a socialist, she protested, though there were many socialistic ideas which she believed could profitably be adopted under the present form of government. Her "Clues to a New Social Order," she explained, contemplated the fullest recognition of the rights of the individual. She expressed her impatience of the multiplication of laws to make mankind better; the widest liberty was essential to all progress.

Grace had listened with the strictest attention. Once or twice Grayling whispered some comment and Atwood, deeply bored, inquired midway of the address whether the first inning wasn't nearly over. At the conclusion the president, following the club's custom, said that Mrs. Trenton would be glad to answer any questions, but the only person who took advantage of the invitation was an elderly gentleman who asked Mrs. Trenton whether she didn't think the Eighteenth Amendment marked a great moral advance for the nation.

"On the contrary, a decided retreat," Mrs. Trenton replied, so incisively that the meeting closed amid general laughter.

"Was it the event of a life-time?" Atwood asked Grayling.

"Old stuff! Miss Durland could have taken the lady's material and made a better story of it."

"A doubtful compliment!" said Grace. "Come along; we must say good-night to Miss Reynolds."

They went forward to where the other guests stood waiting while the club president introduced to Mrs. Trenton such of the members as wished to meet her.

"Don't forget that I'm taking you home," said Atwood. "That's my reward for coming."

Grace had hoped to avoid speaking to Mrs. Trenton again but as Miss Reynolds's other guests were bidding her good-night she couldn't very well escape it.

"Ah, you stayed to the bitter end!" Mrs. Trenton exclaimed with a forced brightening of her face. The hand she gave Grace was cold, and the look of weariness in her eyes was intensified. "I wish we might have you as a convert. No hope, I suppose?"

She turned away with a smile to greet the next in line.

"It wasn't so shocking after all," remarked Miss Reynolds, as Grace bade her good-night. "I'll always remember this, Grace. You helped a lot—you'd have helped a lot even if you hadn't said a word! I was so proud of you, dear."

When she reached home Grace found her mother and Ethel waiting up for her and she sat down in the living room to recount the events of the evening. Mrs. Trenton, she said, was not so terrible; she dismissed her lightly and concentrated upon the other guests at the dinner. She was at pains to give the impression that she had thoroughly enjoyed herself, particularly her meeting with Professor Grayling. The fact, carelessly mentioned, that Jimmie Atwood had brought her home immediately obscured everything else. Mrs. Durland wished to be sure that Jimmie

was the son of the George Rogers Atwood who had made a fortune in the stove business; Ethel thought he was only a nephew and that Jimmie's father operated coal mines somewhere near Terre Haute. Grace, unable to assist in determining this momentous matter, left them and sought the seclusion of her room.

As she closed the door she was oppressed by an overmastering fatigue; she felt that innumerable, mocking, menancing hands were plucking at her. The jealousy that had assailed her fitfully all evening now tore at her heart. A vast loneliness, as of some bleak unhorizoned waste, settled upon her. She locked her door and spread out on her dressing table the sheets of Trenton's last letter, which had reached her that morning, and read them over as she brushed her hair.

. . . and there is no hour in which I do not think of you. The thought of you is like a prayer in my heart. You have touched the best in me. I rebel against the fate that keeps me from you. Sometimes it becomes intolerable—I want you so much, *now*—just to see your face, to look into your eyes, to touch your hand. You are the flower of all the world, I think, and quick upon that comes a sense that you have greatness in you; that you are stronger than I am—possess a truer and broader sense of the meaning of life. . .

Her deep sigh as she finished became a sob and she laid her head upon her arms and the tears came. It was possible that he had written just such letters to the woman who was still his wife; that once he had found in her this same exaltation.

But these thoughts she fought and conquered. As she moved slowly about her room with its dingy old-fashioned furniture, its odds and ends of memorabilia —her high school diploma, framed; a University pen-

nant hung over the mahogany bed,—she slipped back into her youth and her heart went out to Trenton with a child-like faith and confidence. The remembrance of him as he had held her and kissed her; his tenderness, the wistfulness with which he regarded her at times, his fine considerateness, the utter lack of anything common or coarse in him—these memories wrought peace in her heart.

Ready for bed, she huddled inside the window draperies before opening her window, gazing up at the stars. The same bright orbs shone over him, wherever he was. Perhaps at that very moment, he, in the manner of lovers from time immemorial, was invoking their council as he thought of her.

"I love you! I love you, dear!" she whispered and repeated the words, finding in them strength and solace.

She unlocked the door and got into bed just as her mother entered.

"Are you all right, Grace?" Mrs. Durland asked. She stooped and picked up Grace's party slippers from the middle of the floor and put them away in the closet.

"Yes, I'm fine, mother," Grace answered. "Please don't bother about my things. I'll straighten up in the morning."

"All right, dear," said Mrs. Durland. "I'll put your dress on a hanger in the sewing room and press the skirt out tomorrow. It's mussed a little, I noticed."

With the gown over her arm she walked to the bed.

"Are you happy, dear?" she asked, laying her hand for a moment on the girl's forehead.

"Yes, mother. Thank you so much for coming in!"

With an access of emotion she sat up and flung her arms about her mother's neck and kissed her.

"You *are* happy, Grace?" Mrs. Durland repeated solicitously.

"Yes, mother; very happy."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

THE morning paper's account of Mrs. Trenton's lecture came in for discussion at the breakfast table and Mrs. Durland read aloud the society column's report of Miss Reynolds's dinner. The names of the guests were not given, an omission which Mrs. Durland thought singular, but which evoked from Ethel the comment that the people who had countenanced Mrs. Trenton merely to please Miss Reynolds probably had asked to have their names suppressed. Durland, deprived of his paper, which Mrs. Durland and Ethel were clinging to in violation of his long-established rights, asked Grace whether Trenton was in town.

"Mrs. Trenton said she had hoped to see him here, but I don't know anything about it, daddy," she replied carelessly, though the possibility of Trenton's coming to Indianapolis in response to his wife's summons was now uppermost in her thoughts.

She eagerly opened the letter from him which awaited her at the store. It was a hasty lead-pencil scrawl and said that he was leaving that night for Indianapolis to see Mrs. Trenton, who was lecturing there and had asked for a meeting. The summons was most inopportune as his work in Syracuse was not completed and it would be necessary for him to return as quickly as possible. "But I'll see you, of course, if only for a moment," he concluded.

The note served only to revive with keener malevolence the jealousy that she had vanquished the

previous night. Trenton had never written so brusquely before; perhaps his wife's demand for an interview had alarmed him. She stabbed herself with the thought that this woman had the right to demand interviews with him whenever she pleased.

In the search for consolation she asked Irene to go to lunch with her. To her relief, Irene, having already formed at long range her opinion of Mrs. Trenton, asked only a few questions about the dinner.

"Having seen Mary you will understand Ward better," Irene remarked, after her curiosity had been satisfied as to what the women wore and she had suggested that the meeting with Atwood under Miss Reynolds's roof might lead to something.

"Ward's coming here to see her; he may be in town now," said Grace, not in the least interested in Atwood. "She told us at dinner she hadn't seen her husband for she didn't know how long and had been wiring to try to locate him. What do you make of that, Irene? Do you suppose——"

"I'd suppose nothing! You can't tell what women of that sort think or what they'll do. But you can be pretty sure they'll do something foolish every chance they get. Don't you worry about her; you can trust Ward to take care of you no matter what her ladyship knows or guesses about him. If Ward loves you as I think he does he'll go clear down the line for you."

"Do you think that,—do you really mean that," asked Grace tremulously.

"Of course I mean it! Look here, my dear! Seeing that woman has made you nervous. If you'd asked my advice in advance I'd have told you not to go. But now that you went and gone and done it the sooner you forget the whole business the better."

"Irene, I simply had to go! I was simply dying

of curiosity and jealousy. Can't you understand that? You needn't tell me I ought to be ashamed of myself for going; I know well enough I ought to be."

"Cut it out, old dear! I'd probably have done the same thing myself if I'd been in your place. Why, Grace, the first time Mrs. Kemp appeared on my floor after I began playing around with Tommy, I nearly broke my neck to wait on her. You ought to feel better now you've seen the woman. I heard some of our valued customers talking about the lecture this morning and they all knocked. It's her money they listen to, not her ideas. She's no rival of yours, my dear. But, *speaking* of rivals, I've been keeping something from you. Good old John Moore has called on me twice lately and I went to a movie with him Saturday night. Honest, I did! Don't faint, but I actually broke a date with Tommy to see a picture with your old college chum! Go on and scold me!"

"Why, Irene, I'm awfully pleased. John liked you from the first time you met."

"Well, he oughtn't to! Really it would be a lot better if you'd warn him against me. He's so square himself that he refuses to believe anything mean of anybody; and if he should fall in love with me—or worse —if I'd get a case on *him*——"

She shook her head and compressed her lips to indicate the dire possibilities of either predicament.

"Why not?" Grace demanded.

"Don't be silly; you know why not," Irene replied. "He thinks I'm straight and you know I'm—well, you know what you know. And I just wouldn't fool that man! If I did I'd be punished for it and I'd deserve to be."

"Why, Irene!" exclaimed Grace. "I believe you're already in love with him."

"Well, hardly *that,*" Irene replied reflectively, "but I've got one of the symptoms. I'm going to quit my evil ways and chuck Tommy! Old sackcloth and ashes stuff! I ought to have let him go when we had the row about that girl in Chicago. You know, Grace, we're always hearing about the influence of a good woman, but, my dear, it's nothing to what a good man can do! I suppose," she went on in her large philosophic manner, "it's because really fine men are so scarce that when you do spot one you just naturally feel like prostrating yourself in the dust before him. When I began lotus-eating with Tommy I thought I'd never weary of the food, but John's given me an appetite for corn bread and cabbage! Just what will you take for your interest in John?"

"I never could have loved John and he's never thought of me in that way," Grace replied seriously. "But, Irene, for his friendship I wouldn't take a million dollars."

"Of course you wouldn't! And just for his respect and confidence, I'd—"

Grace marvelled to see tears in Irene's eyes.

The hour spent with Irene served at least to change the current of Grace's thoughts. There were other girl friends for whom she had a warm liking but Irene continued to hold first place in her affections. The girl's poise and serenity, her flashes of wisdom, made her increasingly fascinating. And there was a charm in her very unaccountableness. That the luxury-loving Irene, who had so recently spoken of marriage as only a means of attaining comfort and ease, should tolerate the attentions of a young countryman who stood at the threshold of one of the most difficult professions was all but incredible. But this was no more

puzzling than the attraction John apparently found in Irene.

II

By the middle of the afternoon Grace was again enmeshed in a network of doubt and apprehension. Trenton was making a journey for the express purpose of meeting his wife; he had probably reached Indianapolis at noon and gone at once to Miss Reynolds's to see her. Grace's imagination was playing cruel tricks upon her; she pictured the meeting between Trenton and his wife in a hundred ways. He would kiss her, perhaps take her into his arms; and after their long separation it was possible that both might experience a reawakening of the early passion that had died in them. Grace, seeking the lowest depths of humility, knew herself only as Number Eighteen at Shipley's, a girl to be played with and cast aside by another woman's husband whenever it pleased him to be done with her. In her self-abasement she recalled Irene's oft-reiterated declaration about Kemp, that she admired his brains and was fond of him but never deceived herself with the idea that she loved him. This was the wiser way. Grace lashed herself pitilessly for her folly in giving her love so unreservedly when the result could bring nothing but unhappiness. Her love and trust wavered like sunlight struggling to penetrate a field of cloud.

She was standing near the entrance to the ready-to-wear department, inattentive and listless, when the rattle of the elevator door roused her and Trenton stepped out. At the sight of him the blood rushed to her heart till it seemed for a moment that she would die of joy at the sight of him.

He saw her at once and walked quickly toward her. He had never before seemed so handsome and distinguished. His step had the elasticity of youth, and there was a happy light in his eyes as he took her hand. This was the first time he had sought her at Shipley's and she assumed that his coming meant that he had siezed the only possible moment to see her.

"We can't talk here, of course; I've got Kemp's car and I can explain things as we ride," he said. "Can you get excused for the rest of the day?"

Miss Boardman, busily marking price tags, gave the permission with an absent-minded nod and Grace hurried back to report that she was free and would get her wraps and meet him at the main entrance.

When they were in Kemp's limousine Trenton ordered Craig to drive straight north, without mentioning a destination. There was no hint of trouble in his clear steady eyes. His air of perfect self-confidence, of knowing exactly what he was about, restored her faith. She loved him and she was proud that she loved him.

"Please don't be frightened!" he began, clasping her hand when they were clear of the down-town traffic. "I've just seen Mrs. Trenton. She wired me for an appointment to discuss some of her personal business matters. As she's going further West lecturing it was as convenient to see her here as anywhere else. So I came here and have already seen her at Miss Reynolds's. It took some time to go over her investments and explain some changes I had made in them. When that was finished she suddenly asked about that letter I wrote to her last fall from St. Louis. That settled the question as to whether she ever got it."

"Yes, I remember," Grace replied faintly.

In spite of his cheerfulness she was sure that he was leading up to some disagreeable disclosure and involuntarily she drew away her hand.

"It's all right, dear," he went on reassuringly. "She said she knew we'd been drifting further apart for a long time and that she wasn't surprised by my letter. She hadn't acknowledged it because she was waiting for a chance to see me to talk it out. She seemed rather amused. She has a way of being amused at things. And now—don't jump!" he caught her hand and clasped it tight. "She was always a woman of surprises—she said she wanted to see the girl I had mentioned—but not in a disagreeable way at all. If you knew her you'd understand."

"That's it—I do understand," Grace replied slowly. "I was at the dinner Miss Reynolds gave for her last night. I ought to have asked you if it was all right to go—but I was afraid you'd say no—and—and I *had* to see her." Her voice broke in a sob, but lifting her head she hurried on. "I was jealous—terribly jealous—and something tells me that—that—we are —near the end."

"Please, dear; don't give way to foolish fears!" he implored. "I'm glad you went to the dinner; that was all right and I want to hear all about it later. Having seen Mrs. Trenton you ought to know that her request is quite characteristic. Don't you see that she's curious about you, just as you were about her! I really think she means to be kind to me. It's unusual of course, but—Mrs. Trenton is a very unusual woman!"

Grace looked at him in a kind of dumb wonder.

"You—you told her my name—" she faltered.

"No; certainly not! You weren't mentioned. I think she assumed that the girl I wrote her about

lived in St. Louis. She was rather taken aback when I said she lived here."

"And you told her you'd produce me—exhibit me for her criticism? Ward, what can you be thinking of; what can you think of *me* to ask such a thing? I suppose you told her everything?"

"Why Grace, this isn't like you! You're taking it all too seriously. Mrs. Trenton has no cause to think anything except that I've met you and fallen in love with you. You must be reasonable, dear," he went on patiently. "She knows nothing and has no right to assume—what we'd rather she didn't. It's just a whim of hers. If I thought she wouldn't treat you as one lady should treat another I wouldn't ask you to go. It will be the most formal call—no chance for anything unpleasant, even if she wanted to be disagreeable."

"She could be very disagreeable. I didn't like her; I didn't like her at all! It seems to me sheer folly to put myself in her way unnecessarily."

"I tell you it will be all right!" he protested. "She will be surprised, of course, to find that she has already met you. You know I wouldn't cause you the slightest embarrassment or pain for the world."

For a moment she pondered, her confidence in him and her wish to accede to his wishes struggling against suspicion and jealousy.

"You're sure this isn't a trick—a trap!" she asked.

"Of course not, dear! How can you think such a thing? Mrs. Trenton really has a sense of humor; and she's a woman of the world. Besides she has no ground whatever for attacking you; I can't imagine her doing that in any circumstances. I'm just meeting her wish to see a girl I told her I admire. But—I count more than I dare say on the result. I want

to give her a chance to practice what she preaches!"

"Well," said Grace, searching his eyes with a long gaze, "I'll go since you insist, but I think it's foolish. It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of! But she can't do more than murder me."

"She can't do more than approve of you!" he cried and ordered Craig to drive to Miss Reynolds's.

III

Mrs. Trenton was immediately visible, writing at a small table in the living room, when they were ushered into the reception parlor. She wore a pair of shell-rimmed library glasses, and it occurred to Grace that the blank stare that had been so disconcerting the previous night was probably attributable to some defect of vision. She did not lift her head when the maid spoke to her but nodded and went on writing for several minutes. Then she laid aside the glasses and walked unhurriedly to the door.

"Ah, Ward, back again!"

"I believe you've met Miss Durland, May," said Trenton.

"Yes; of course," she replied with a smile of recognition that faded instantly. "It's nice of you to come, Miss Durland. I didn't know last night that you were acquainted with Mr. Trenton. Dear Miss Reynolds didn't mention it or I should, of course——"

She broke off in her odd way, her gaze wandering. Her indifference was an achievement in itself, a masterly thing. She wore a blue house gown of an exquisite simplicity. A string of crystal beads hung about her neck and she put her hand to them frequently as though to make sure they were there. As she sank into a chair her long figure relaxed into

graceful lines. She was much more composed than at the dinner, with a languorous composure that might have been donned for the occasion like a garment. She reminded Grace of those portraits of women done by fashionable painters which satisfy the artistic sense without conveying a sense of reality.

"You forget, May, that I haven't met Miss Reynolds," Trenton remarked to her; but she ignored him.

"You are—what do you say—a Hoosier, Miss Durland?" she asked, her gaze falling as if by chance upon Grace.

"Oh, yes, I'm a native." Grace answered with a faint smile; but her courage was ebbing. She hated Mrs. Trenton. She tried to think of something amusing to add to her confession that she was a native Indianian but the atmosphere of the room was not conducive to brilliancy. To make conversation Trenton reminded his wife that they had once met a certain senator from Indiana at White Sulphur Springs.

A "yes" charged with all the apathy that can be conveyed by the rising inflexion, was the only reply that was evoked by this attempt to link Indiana to large affairs of state. Trenton asked Grace whether Indiana had ever produced more than one president, and she tried to ease her discomfiture by replying that the state had rather specialized in vice-presidents.

"Oh, that!" remarked Mrs. Trenton. "How very droll! I suppose the Indiana school teacher has a frightful time instilling in the young Hoosier mind the names of all your vice-presidents. Do they pay teachers well in Indiana?"

"Not so well as farther West, I believe," Grace answered; "but I know little about it."

"That's the next thing I'm going to take up. I'm having data collected now," Mrs. Trenton said with more spirit than she had before manifested.

"That's fine, May," said Trenton cordially. "That's a work worth doing."

"You'd really approve of that, Ward?" she asked. "You haven't always been so indulgent of my whims."

Grace, increasingly uncomfortable, started when Mrs. Trenton addressed her directly.

"Miss Durland, if you see too much of Mr. Trenton you will find him a singularly unreasonable person. But," with a shrug, "all men have the ancient conceit of their sex superiority."

She had drawled the "if you see too much" in a manner to give the phrase a peculiar insinuating emphasis. Grace caught its significance at once and her cheeks burned; but she was less angry at the woman than at Trenton, whose face betrayed no resentment. She rose and walked to the door.

"Dear me, don't run away!" Mrs. Trenton exclaimed. "Miss Reynolds will be back shortly. She was called away to some hospital—I think it was—to see a friend. Do wait. There will be tea, I think."

Trenton was on his feet. No man's mind is ever quite so agile or discerning as a woman's. He had just caught up with the phrase that had angered Grace.

"I have kept my word," he said, rising and addressing his wife directly. "When I promised you that if I ever met a woman I felt I could care for I would tell you, I was in earnest. At your own suggestion and in perfect good faith I asked Miss Durland to come here."

"My dear Ward! You were always a man of your word!" she said with a hint of mockery in her voice.

"I assure you that I'm delighted to meet Miss Durland. She's very charming, really."

"I don't intend that you shall forget yourself!" he said sharply. "Your conduct since you came into this room has been contemptible!"

"I'm most contrite! Do forgive me, Miss Durland."

She lay back in her chair in a pose of exaggerated ease and lazily turned her head to look at Grace.

"I assume," she said, "that you are my chosen successor, and I can't complain of my husband's taste. You are very handsome and I can see how your youth would appeal to him, but—there are things I must consider. Please wait"—Grace had laid her hand on the door,—"I may as well say it all now. I've probably led Ward to think that if such an emergency as this arose I'd free him and bid him Godspeed. But, you see, confronted with the fact, I find it necessary to think a little of myself. One must, you know, and I'm horribly selfish. It would never do to give my critics a chance to take a fling at me as a woman whose marriage is a failure. You can see for yourself, Miss Durland, how my position would be weakened if I were a divorcee. Much as I hate to disappoint you—it would never do—really it would not!"

"Just what are you assuming, Mrs. Trenton?" demanded Grace, meeting the gaze of the older woman.

"We needn't discuss that now!" interrupted Trenton peremptorily.

"No; I suppose you'd have to confer privately with Miss Durland before reaching a conclusion. But, I suggest, Miss Durland, for the sake of your own happiness, that you avoid, if, indeed, the warning isn't too late, forming any—what do we call such—"

"That will do! Stop right there!" Trenton interrupted.

Grace had swung round from the door, and stood, her lips parted and with something of the look of an angry, hurt child in her eyes. It seemed to her that she was an unwilling eavesdropper, hearing words not intended for her ears, but without the power to escape. Then she heard Trenton's voice.

"You'd better go, Grace," he said quietly. "Craig is waiting. He will take you home."

Grace closed the door after her and paused in the dim hall. A nightmare numbness had seized her; and she found herself wondering whether she could reach the outer door; it seemed remote, unattainable. She steadied herself against the newel, remembering an accident in childhood that had left her dazed and nauseated. Trenton had told her to go; at his wife's bidding he was sending her away and it wasn't necessary for him to dismiss her like that!

She felt herself precipitated into a measureless oblivion; nothing good or beautiful ever had been or would be. He had told her to go; that was all; and like a grieved and heartbroken child she resented being sent away. In her distress she was incapable of crediting him with the kindness that had prompted him to bid her leave.

She was startled by a quick step on the walk outside, followed by the click of the lock, and the door, flung open, revealed Miss Reynolds.

"Why, Grace, I had no idea—why, child! What's the matter? You're as white as a sheet!"

"I must go," said Grace in a whisper, withdrawing the hand Miss Reynolds had clasped. The door remained open and the world, a fantastically distorted world, lay outside. With slow steps she passed her

bewildered friend, saying in the tone of one muttering in an unhappy dream:

"I must go! He told me to go."

"He—who?"

The astonished Miss Reynolds, who at first thought Grace was playing a joke of some kind, watched her pass slowly down the walk to the gate and enter the waiting car. She went out upon the steps, uncertain what to do and caught a last glimpse of Grace's face, her eyes set straight ahead, as the machine bore her away.

IV

The thought of remaining at home was unbearable, and after supper Grace telephoned Irene to ask whether she was free for the evening.

"Tommy said something about taking a drive and I'm going over to Minnie's to meet him. You come right along. I saw Ward snatch you out of the store. Pretty cool, I call it! Tommy said he was going back East at seven, so you're a widow once more!"

Grace left the house with her father, who was spending all his evenings at Kemp's plant. To all questions at home as to the progress of his motor Durland replied that he guessed it would be all right. On the street-car he told Grace he was anxious to see Trenton; there were difficulties as to the motor that he wished to discuss with him. He said he had written, asking an interview as soon as possible, but that Trenton had not replied. Grace answered that she knew nothing about him and her heart sank as she remembered that Trenton was no longer a part of her life and that in the future he would come and go and she would never be the wiser.

It was all over and she faced the task of convincing herself that her love for him had been a delusion, a mere episode to be forgotten as quickly as possible. She left her father at Washington street, cheerily wishing him good luck, and took a car that ran past Minnie's door.

Irene was alone and, in a new gown of coppergreen crepe that enhanced the gold in her hair, might have posed as the spirit of spring. Minnie had remained down town, she explained, and Tommy was not expected until nine.

"What's happened?" she demanded. "I know something's doing or you wouldn't have called me up from home."

Grace took off her coat, hung it over the back of a chair and flung herself down on the couch.

"Console me a little, Irene,—but not too much—I've seen Ward for the last time."

"His wife make a row?" Irene inquired.

"Yes, he took me to see her and she——"

"He took you to *see* her! Grace Durland, what *are* you talking about?"

"Just that!" and Grace, no longer able to restrain herself, burst into tears.

"You poor baby!"

Irene jumped up and thrust a pillow back of Grace's head and sat down beside her. "Tell me about it if you want to, but not unless you feel like it, honey."

"I've simply got to tell you, Irene. Oh——!"

"Grace Durland, don't be silly! You know I'd *die* for you!"

She listened in patient silence while Grace told with minute detail and many tears the story of her interview with Mrs. Trenton.

"I loved him; I still love him, Irene!" she moaned

pitifully when she had finished. "And it had to end like that!"

"If you want my opinion," said Irene judicially, "I'll say that Ward Trenton is a perfect nut—the final and consummate nut of the whole nut family! The idea that he would take a girl like you—and you're a good deal of a kid, my dear—to call on a woman like that wife of his, who's an experienced worldly creature, and as much as tell her that he's in love with you! It's the limit!"

"But," said Grace, quick to defend the moment Trenton was attacked, "he had every reason to believe she would be decent! She'd always let him think that if there was anyone else she'd—she'd——"

"She'd hand him a transfer!" Irene laughed ironically. "Isn't that just like poor old Ward! I tell you men are even as little babes where women are concerned. There isn't a woman on earth who'd just calmly sit by and let another woman walk off with her husband even if she hated him like poison. It's against nature, dearest. I can see how that woman would make the bluff, all right, but all she wanted was to see what you looked like and finding you young and beautiful she tried to make you feel like a counterfeit nickel. The trouble with Ward is that he's so head over heels in love with you that he's lost his mind. I wonder what happened after you skipped! I'll bet it was some party! But don't you believe he's going to give you up—not Ward! Everything's going to straighten out, honey. His telling you to go doesn't mean a blessed thing! He just wanted to get you out of the scrap."

"It means the end," said Grace with a sigh that lost itself in a sob.

The bell tinkled and Grace ran away to remove the

traces of tears from her face. When she reappeared Kemp greeted her with his usual raillery.

"I had only a word with Ward over the telephone," he said. "He came out to see his wife and as he borrowed my limousine I guess he showed her the village sights. But, of course, you know more about that bird than I do, Grace. You couldn't scare me up a drink, could you, Irene? Minnie's got some stuff of mine concealed here somewhere. Just a spoonful—no? Grace, this girl is a cruel tyrant. She positively refuses to let me die a drunkard's happy death."

He evidently wasn't aware that Grace had seen Trenton and Irene carefully kept the talk in safe channels. He had brought his roadster, not knowing that he was to find Grace at Minnie's, but he insisted that the car carried three comfortably and he wouldn't consider leaving her behind.

It was the same car in which Trenton had driven her into town after the night they spent together at The Shack. In spite of her attempts to forget, thoughts of him filled her mind like an implacable host of soldiery. . . .

After a plunge into the country they swung back to town along the river.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Kemp suddenly. "There's my little factory over there in the moonlight. Have you ever seen it, Grace? We'll just dash in for a minute."

"I wonder if father's still there?" said Grace as they drove into the lighted yard.

"We'll soon find out. That's his workshop yonder where you see the bluish lights. I see O'Reilly's light on in the main office. That fellow works too hard."

"It's a good thing somebody works around this place," said Irene. "The world knows you don't."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that," Kemp retorted, and led the way down a long aisle of one of the steel and glass units of the big plant. The moon diffused its mild radiance through the glass roof, as though mocking with a superior mystery the silent inert machinery.

The sound of voices became audible in a room partitioned off in one corner. The door was ajar and two men in overalls and jumpers were pondering a motor set up on a testing block.

The trio remained outside, watching the two intent, rapt figures. One Grace had recognized as her father; the other, she realized bewilderedly, was Ward Trenton. Trenton, unconscious that he was watched, raised his hand and Durland turned a switch. The hum of a motor filled the room; and Durland turned slowly from the motor to glance at Trenton. Trenton signalled to shut off the power and dropped upon his knees, peering into the machine. Durland took up a sheet of paper and from it answered the questions which Trenton shot at him in rapid succession.

"Let's have the power again," said Trenton. He rose, bent his ear to study the sound, turned to Durland and nodded.

"Let's see what they're up to," said Kemp and shouted Trenton's name. Grace drew back as the two men turned toward them, but Irene seized her arm.

"Don't you dare run away!"

Trenton came toward them snatching off his blue mechanic's cap. There was a smudge across his face and his hands were black from contact with the machinery.

"I didn't really lie to you, Tommy: I meant to leave tonight but remembered that Mr. Durland wanted to see me, so here I am."

They followed him to the testing block where Durland had remained, too engrossed to heed them.

"I'm glad you came just when you did," said Trenton addressing all of them but looking at Grace. "Mr. Durland will be ready to begin the final tests tomorrow. I'm sure they're going to be successful. I want you to be here, Tommy, and see the thing through. Just look at this!"

He deftly lifted out a part of the motor for Kemp's inspection, restored it and then bent over the bench, rapidly scribbling notes on the back of a blue print.

"Congratulations are now in order, I suppose," said Kemp. He turned and shook hands with Durland, who was regarding the motor with a puzzled look on his face. Trenton said he would remain a while longer—he might stay all night, he added with a laugh.

"This is too important to leave, so I've changed all my plans and will be here two or three days."

"When this bird works, he works," said Kemp, laying his hand affectionately on Trenton's shoulder.

Trenton followed them out, keeping close to Grace. When they were out of ear shot of her father—Durland apparently hadn't noticed that Grace was in the room—Trenton said:

"I called you at home this evening and found you'd gone out. I want to see you; I *must* see you," he said pleadingly.

Kemp had reached the main shop and was explaining to Irene some of the points of the motor.

"Kemp!" Trenton called. "What are you doing tomorrow night?"

"Nothing; I'm ready for anything."

"Well, Grace and I would like to have dinner with you at The Shack."

"A grand idea! Only remember—none of this pro-

hibition stuff you pulled on me Christmas. I cannot dine without my wine!" he chanted.

When they reached the yard Kemp and Irene were waiting by the car. Trenton caught Grace's hand and whispered:

"Remember, I love you! I shall always love you."

"No—no—" she began. "Oh this isn't kind! I thought you had gone—or——"

"Come along, Grace," cried Kemp. "See you tomorrow, Ward. Goodnight and good luck!"

To Grace, on the homeward drive, peace seemed an unattainable thing. She had firmly resolved never to see Trenton again; but she had not only seen him but the sight of him had deepened the hunger in her heart. She was without the will to deny him the meeting for which he had asked. It was sweet to think that he had remained if only to assist her father when he had definitely said that he was leaving that night. Yes; there was kindness in this; and even though he had sent her away from Miss Reynolds's and wounded her deeply in his manner of doing it, she knew that it was always his wish to be kind and that no power could keep her from seeing him again, if only for a last good-bye.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

As she dressed the next morning Grace hummed and whistled, happy in the consciousness that before the day ended she would see Trenton again. The romantic strain in her warmed and quickened at the thought. Even if they were to part for all time and she should go through life with his love only a memory, it would be a memory precious and ineffacable, that would sweeten and brighten all her years.

In his workman's garb, as she had seen him at Kemp's, she idealized him anew. If it had been his fate to remain a laborer, his skill would have set him apart from his fellows. He could never have been other than a man of mark. It was a compensation for anything she might miss in her life to have known the love of such a man. She was impatient with herself and sought the lowest depths of self-abasement for having doubted him. She should never again question his sincerity or his wisdom, but would abide by his decision in all things.

When she reached the dining room her father was already gone, and her mother seemed troubled about him.

"He was excited and nervous when he came home last night," said Mrs. Durland. "He hardly slept and he left an hour ago saying he'd get a cup of coffee on his way through town. I'm afraid things haven't been going right with him. It would be a terrible blow if the motor didn't turn out as he expected."

"Let's just keep hoping, mother; that's the only

way," Grace replied cheerily. "They wouldn't be wasting time on it at Kemp's if there wasn't something in it."

"I guess you're right there," interposed Ethel. "Kemp has the reputation of being a cold-blooded proposition. And I suppose the great Trenton values his own reputation too much to recommend anything that hasn't got money in it."

"Poor foolish men *will* persist in going into business to make money, not for fun," Grace replied. "I suppose Gregg and Burley don't sell insurance just as a matter of philanthropy. Mr. Trenton would soon be out of work if he didn't have the confidence of the people who hire him. I wouldn't be so bitter if I were you."

"I heard you rolling up in an automobile last night," Ethel persisted. "You seem to be getting the benefit of somebody's money."

"Ethel!" cried her mother despairingly.

"Let her rave," replied Grace calmly. "When Mr. Burley drives Ethel home from the office it's an act of Christian kindness, but if I get a lift it's a sin."

"Mr. Burley," began Ethel, breathing heavily, "Mr. Burley is the very soul of honor! He wanted to talk to me about some of the work in our Sunday school and hadn't time to discuss it in the office."

"Don't think for a minute I have any objection! If he was just opening up a little flirtation it would be all right with me."

"How dare you?" cried Ethel, beginning to cry.

"Please, Grace," began Mrs. Durland, pausing on her way to the kitchen with the coffee pot.

"All right, mother," said Grace. "I resent just a little bit having Ethel grab all the virtue in the family."

"I'm not ashamed to tell who brings me home anyhow," Ethel flung at her.

"Neither, for that matter, am I! It was Mr. Thomas Ripley Kemp who brought me home last night. He'd taken Irene and me for a drive."

"So that *was* it! I thought I recognized the car. That Kemp! I suppose he's getting tired of Irene and is looking for another girl!"

"Well, dearie, he hasn't said anything about it," Grace replied. "But you never can tell."

"Girls! This must stop right here! We can't have the day beginning with a wrangle. You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"I'm through, mother," said Grace. "I didn't start the row. I've reached a place where Ethel doesn't really worry me any more."

"Well, you were always a tease and Ethel is sensitive. I do wish you'd both exercise a little restraint."

Grace found a brief note in the society column of the morning paper recording Mrs. Trenton's departure, and an editorial ridiculing her opinions. Elsewhere there were interviews with a dozen prominent men and women on Mrs. Trenton's lecture, all expressing disapproval of her ideas. A leading Socialist disavowed any sympathy with Mrs. Trenton's programme and denounced her "Clues to a New Social Order" as a mere rehash of other books. He characterized her as a woman of wealth who was merely seeking notoriety by parading herself as a revolutionist and who would be sure to resist, with the innate selfishness and greed of her class, any interference with her personal comfort and ease.

Grace carried the newspaper with her to the trolley and on the way down town re-read these criticisms of

Mrs. Trenton with keenest satisfaction. Mrs. Trenton was not a great woman animated by a passion of humanity but narrow, selfish and cruel. She thought again of the encounter at Miss Reynolds's with renewed sympathy for Trenton. After all he had met the difficult situation in the only way possible. He had said once that he didn't understand his wife and Grace consoled herself with the reflection that probably no one could understand her, least of all, her husband.

In the course of the day Grace learned from Irene that Kemp, who was on the entertainment committee for a large national convention, had decided to ask several friends among the delegates to The Shack.

"It won't be a shocker, like some of Tommy's parties, only a little personal attention for a few of the old comrades," said Irene. "You and Ward can see as little of the rest of the bunch as you please. Tommy has promised me solemnly to let booze alone. I suppose his wife will never know how hard I've worked to keep him straight! Ridiculous, isn't it? Before that woman came back from California Tommy hadn't touched a drop for a month, and he's been doing wonderfully ever since. The good lady was so pleased with his appearance and conduct that she beat it for New York last night to buy clothes and by the time she gets back I'll be ready to release my mortgage on Tommy for good and all. I've broken the news to him gently and he's been awfully nice about it. This is really my last appearance with Tommy—it's understood on both sides. I wouldn't go at all if it were not for you and Ward."

Grace envied Irene the ease with which she met situations. Irene's cynicism, she had decided, was only on the surface; she wished she could be sure that

she herself possessed the sound substratum of characterthat Irene was revealing. Irene had sinned grievously against the laws of God and man; but after disdaining those influences that seek to safeguard society, and carrying her head high, with a certain serene impudence in her wrong doing, she now appeared to be on good terms with her soul. It was a strange thing that this could be—one of the most curious and baffling of all Grace's recent experiences. Face to to face with the problem of her future relations with Trenton, Grace was finding in Irene something akin to a moral tonic. Irene, by a code of her own, did somehow manage to cling fast to things reckoned fine and noble. Irene, in spite of herself, had the soul of a virtuous woman.

It was to be a party of ten, Grace learned after Irene had conferred with Kemp by telephone at the lunch hour. For the edification of the three strange men Irene had provided three other girls who had, as Irene said, some class and knew how to amuse tired business men without becoming vulgar. Grace knew these young women—they were variously employed down town—but she would never have thought of asking them to "go on a party."

"Not one of these girls makes less than two thousand a year," Irene announced loftily. "God preserve me from cheap stuff! It makes me sick, Grace, to see these poor little fools who run around the streets, all dolled up with enough paint on their faces to cover the state house and not enough brains in their heads to make a croquette for a sick mosquito. If it hadn't been for all this silly rot about emancipating women they'd be at home cooking and helping mamma with the wash. As it is they draw twelve a week and spend it all on clothes to advertise their sex. Do you know,

Grace, I sometimes shudder for the future of the human race!"

II

Jerry had been reinforced by a colored cateress and the country supper produced at The Shack proved to be a sumptuous dinner. Kemp had brought from his well-stocked cave on the farm the ingredients for a certain cocktail, known by his name throughout the corn-belt. The "Tommy Kemp" was immediately pronounced to be the last word in cocktails,—a concoction which, one of the visitors declared, completely annulled and set aside the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States as an insolent assault upon the personal liberty and the palate of man. Kemp was in the gayest spirits; the party was wholly to his taste. The men he entertained were conspicuously successful, and leaders in the business and social life of their several cities. Irene had confided to Grace that there were at least ten millions of good money represented in the party.

The cocktails were served in the living room to the accompaniment of much lively chatter. Grace found herself observing with interest the readiness with which the young women who were strangers to The Shack's hospitality entered into the spirit of the occasion and met on terms of familiar good fellowship the men they hadn't seen before. It helped her to forget her disappointment at the size of the party to speculate about the men and the curious phase of human nature that made it possible for gentlemen whose names were well known throughout America, who looked as though they might pass the plate in church

every Sunday, to enter joyfully into the pleasures of such a function. Irene had made no mistake in her choice of girls; they were handsome; they looked well in their summer frocks; they were lively and responsive; they were pastmistresses of the gentle art of kidding. There was no question but that the visiting gentlemen of wealth and social position enjoyed being kidded, and the fact that some of them had daughters at home much older than the girls who did the kidding in no wise mitigated their joy.

One of the gentlemen evidently preferred Grace to the girl who had been assigned to him. Under the inspiration of his cocktail he told Grace that he had long wished to meet her; that now they had met he was resolved that they should never part again. Grace summoned all her powers of flirtation and encouraged him, realizing that to snub him would be to prove herself a poor sport; and she had heard enough of parties from Irene to know that a girl must not when "on a party" give cause for any suspicion that she is of the melancholy tribe of kill-joys. She took a sip of the "Tommy Kemp" and handed it to the gentleman who was so beguiled by her charms, who drained the glass, murmuring ecstatically:

"To the most beautiful girl in the world!"

"Don't let grandpa worry you," whispered Irene. "Just tease him a little and he'll think he's having the time of his life. We're not drinking—you and I. This is positively my last party! I'm going to have my hands full keeping Tommy sober."

Trenton was talking during the cocktailing period to one of the most attractive of the girls, and when Grace glanced at him he smiled and held up his unemptied glass and put it back on the tray. He was not drinking, not even the single cocktail he usually

permitted himself. There was serious business before them; both must keep their heads clear for it.

The dinner seemed endlessly long. Now and then Grace felt the reassuring pressure of Trenton's hand, but the gentleman on the other side of her, under the mellowing influence of champagne piled upon the "Tommy Kemps" he had imbibed, was making violent love to her; and his elaborate tributes of adoration could not be wholly ignored. Seeing that Trenton was talking little, Kemp, still sober, thanks to Irene's watchfulness, addressed him directly:

"I've got news for you, Ward. At five o'clock this afternoon I closed a deal for Cummings's plant. Bought Isaac Cummings's controlling interest and for better or worse the darned thing's mine. Please, everybody, drink to good luck!"

"We don't know what it's all about, but we're for you, Tommy," cried one of the girls.

"I thought you said you'd never do it, Tommy," said Trenton, smiling at his friend and lifting his champagne glass, reversed as it had stood on the table.

Kemp protested that this was bad luck and ordered Jerry to serve no more food until every one had drunk to the success of the merger. This brought them all to their feet with lifted glasses.

"Oh, king, live forever!" cried Irene.

"That's something like it," said Kemp. "I didn't mention the matter just to advertise my business. I wanted you to know, Grace, that it gave me a special satisfaction on your account to see Cummings pass out. It was a downright low trick he played on your father. Things do sort o' even up in this world and this struck quick and hard. When Cummings threw your father out the business was ripe for bankruptcy.

Don't let Ward scold me. He advised me against it."

"I advised you against taking on new responsibilities," Trenton replied. "You've got enough on your hands now."

"You think I'm a sick man," said Kemp. "But I'm going to see you all under the sod. I like this world and I'm going to live a hundred years. Jerry, fill 'em up!"

There was more food than anyone needed or wanted and when Jerry began serving dessert Trenton suggested to Grace that they leave the table. Their leaving evoked loud protests. Irene was now furiously angry at Kemp, who had been unable to resist the lure of the champagne, a vintage without duplicate in all America, he declared.

The gentleman at Grace's left, reduced to a maudlin state by his host's generous distribution of wine, loudly importuned her not to go. Kemp announced his purpose to make a speech and was trying to get upon his feet when Irene pulled him down. One of the visitors began to sing and seized a candle from the table with which to beat time. He was bawling, "He's a jolly good fellow," as Grace and Trenton effected their escape.

They breathed deep of the clean country air when they reached the long veranda at the side of the house.

"Poor Tommy; I suppose there's no way of stopping him," remarked Trenton.

Both were aware of a new restraint the moment they were alone. The still night was sweet with spring and the earth seemed subdued by the mystery of green things growing.

Grace walked the length of the veranda, then back to the steps, Trenton beside her. He was still troubled by a sense of responsibility for Kemp. The dis-

cordant noises from the dining room followed them and they debated whether they should try to break up the party but decided against it.

"Let's get away from the racket," said Trenton. "When I suggested coming out for supper it didn't occur to me that Tommy would be pulling off a bacchanalian feast. Tommy's incorrigible—dear old Tommy! But—we must talk. Shall we go up yonder where we can look out over the river?"

The stars and an old moon that stared blandly across the heavens made the path easily discernible. As they loitered along he spoke of Kemp's purchase of the Cummings concern.

"I did advise Tommy against it," he said, "because of the additional burdens he'll have to carry. But it's a good business stroke. He's wiped out an old competitor and with your father's improvements on Cummings's motor Tommy's going to be greatly strengthened."

"I've been afraid," said Grace, "that father's ideas wouldn't prove practical. He's seemed terribly worried lately."

"Only the usual perplexities of a genius who's worn out from long application! He can breathe easy now. The motor's going to be a wonder. I was with your father all day and he's attained every excellence he claimed. You have every reason to be proud of him."

"It's all your kindness," she murmured.

"Oh, not a bit of it! There's no sentiment about mechanics. You've either got it or you haven't. And your father is sound on the fundamentals where most inventors are weak."

They sat down on a rustic bench on the bluff above the river and he threw his overcoat across her knees. Above them towered a sycamore; below they heard

the murmur and ripple of running water. He put his arm about her, drew her close and kissed her.

"I wish it were all true, as we can imagine it to be in this quiet place, that we're absolutely alone in the world—just ourselves."

"But it isn't true; we've just run away from the world for a little while," she said, "but I'm glad for this."

She laid her hand on his and gently stroked it.

"I hope you understood why I didn't go yesterday as I'd intended. I couldn't leave without explaining. I couldn't have you think that I took you to Miss Reynolds's just to make you uncomfortable. It was my mistake and a stupid blunder."

"No; the mistake was mine," she insisted. "I realized afterwards that my first feeling was right, that it was foolish to go."

"I was honest about it. Mrs. Trenton had led me to think that she wouldn't resent meeting any woman who promised to give me the love and companionship it wasn't in her power to give me. I took her at her word. You understand that, don't you?"

"You ought to have known, Ward, and so should I, that no woman would ever have anything but hatred for another woman her husband falls in love with."

"But what I've given you she never had! I want you to believe me when I say that I was really deceived by what I took to be her wholly friendly attitude."

"It doesn't make the least difference now, Ward. I know you wouldn't have taken me to see her if you'd known what would happen. I'll never have any but the kindest thoughts of you. Please believe that."

She moved a little away from him and leaned back, her hands relaxed in her lap.

"It's all been a mistake—everything—from the beginning," she went on in a low voice.

"My loving you hasn't been a mistake," he said earnestly. "Nothing has changed that or can ever change it."

"You merely think that. If you didn't see me for a while you'd forget me," she said, following unconsciously the ritual of unhappy lovers in all times.

"No," he gently protested. "That isn't the way of it. You don't really think that. Please say that you don't."

His tone of pleading caused her to turn to him and fling her arms about his neck.

"Oh, I love you so! I love you so!" she sobbed.

His face was wet with her tears. He took her again into his arms, turning her face that he might kiss the tears away. Her whole body shook with her convulsive sobs.

"Dearest little girl! Poor, dear little child!"

In the branches above a bird fluttered and cheeped as though startled in its dreaming. She freed herself, sought her handkerchief to dry her eyes. With the impotence of man before a woman's grief he sought to brush back a wisp of hair that had fallen across her cheek and his hand trembled. Her face seemed to hover in the star dusk; he saw the quiver of her lashes, the parted lips, felt for an instant the throbbing pulse in her throat.

"I knew the end would come," she said, with a deep sigh, "But I didn't know it would be like this. It's been so dear, so wonderful! I thought it would go on forever!"

Her gaze was upon the dark uneven line of the trees across the river where they brushed the stars.

"But it isn't the end, dear! A love like ours can't die. It belongs to the things of all time."

"Please, Ward," she said impatiently, drawing her cloak more tightly about her shoulders. "Let's not deceive ourselves any more. You know we can't go on," she continued, as one who has reasoned through a thing and reached an irrefutable conclusion. "It's all been like a dream; but dreams don't last. And this should never have begun!"

"You break my heart when you say things like that! As we've said so many times—it all had to be!"

"We were fools to think it could last," she said. "But it was more my fault than yours. And you've been dear and kind—Oh, so beautifully kind."

"You've trusted me; you've proved that! You've never doubted—you don't doubt now that I love you!"

"Oh, it does no good to talk—let's just be quiet—I do love you——"

"I must talk," he replied stubbornly. "You are the dearest thing in the world to me. I couldn't foresee what happened. It's only right you should know what occurred after you left Miss Reynolds's."

"No! Please no! I have no right to know; and it can make no difference. I knew it was all over when I left the house, but I did want to see you once more——"

She was trying to be brave but the words faltered and died.

"I didn't discuss you, try to explain you in any way. I only expressed my indignation at the wholly unnecessary manner in which Mrs. Trenton treated you, after encouraging me to believe that you would be treated with every courtesy. I suppose it was jealousy that prompted her to speak to you as she did. Miss Rey-

nolds came in at once. You must have met her—and I took leave after I'd tried to cover up the fact that something disagreeable had happened. That was all."

"It was enough. There wasn't a thing you could say. Mrs. Trenton had every right on her side. I hope you'll go back to her and tell her that any feeling you had for me was just a mistake; make light of the whole thing. Of course she loves you. If she didn't she wouldn't be jealous. There's nothing for you to do now but to make your peace with her. Don't trouble about me. I don't want to stand in the way of your happiness."

"Grace," he said, patient in spite of her strained petulant tone, "there's no question of love about it. We know we love each other; but we've got to be sane about this."

"Let's not talk about it, Ward! You know as well as I do that we've reached the end. And please, dear, don't make it harder for me by pretending it isn't. I'm not a child, you know."

"We're not going to pretend anything, Grace, least of all we're not going to pretend that everything's over when we know we couldn't forget if we wanted to. But we've got to have a care for a little while at least, now that Mrs. Trenton knows just enough to arouse her suspicions. I feel my responsibility about you very seriously. Please—won't you believe me when I say that it's of you I'm thinking first? We might go on seeing each other as we have been, or I might take you away with me—I've thought of that; but I've thought too of the danger. I can't promise you that Mrs. Trenton wouldn't spy upon us,—do something that would drag you into the newspapers, make an ugly mess. Her prominence would make at-

tractive newspaper material of you and me, too. I love you too dearly to take any chances. Don't you understand? Isn't it better——"

"Oh, please stop, Ward! Don't talk to me as though I were a child! It all comes to the same thing, that we mustn't see each other any more. I knew it when I left Miss Reynolds's yesterday. It would have been better if we hadn't come out here."

"It won't be forever," he doggedly persisted. "In the end I'm going to have you. I want you to remember that."

"Ward, how perfectly foolish of you to talk that way! If we were to go on as we have been we wouldn't be happy. Let's just acknowledge that this is the last time."

"No," he protested. "It's not going to be that way! You've lost your courage and I can't blame you for seeing things black. If I had only myself to consider I'd run away with you tonight; but that would be a despicable thing for me to do. I love you too much for that!"

The protestation of his love brought her no ease. She was half angered by his stubborn refusal to face the truth, and his professed belief that sometime in some way they were to be reunited. He was trying to see the light of hope ahead where all was dark to her.

It was strange to be sitting there beside him, thinking already of their love with all its intimacies, that had seemed to bind them together forever, as something that had been swept into a past from which, in a little while, memory would cease to recall it. This was love! This was the thing that had been written of and sung of in all the ages; and it was a lure contrived only to bruise and break and destroy.

She touched the lowest depths of despair, snatched away her hand when he tried to possess it; thought of him for an instant with repulsion. The wistful tenderness of the night, the monotonous ripple of water beneath, the very tranquillity of the stars seemed to mock and taunt her.

He waited patiently, silent, impassive, as though he knew what she was thinking and knew, too, that such thoughts were inevitable and must run their course.

The silence fell upon her like a soothing hand. The tumultuous rush of her thoughts ceased; she was amazed at the serenity with which suddenly she viewed the situation.

He was finer than she, wiser, more far seeing. Something in his figure, in his dimly etched profile in the faint starlight touched her profoundly. It was selfish of her to forget that he too suffered. He was a man she had given herself to without reservation, and with all the honesty and fervor of her young heart, and to think harshly of him was to acknowledge herself a shameless wanton, no better than a girl on the street. She could not think ill of him without debasing herself. And she did love him; she had loved him from the first, and it was not the way of love to wound.

Perhaps he had been sincere in saying that he wished to protect her—this was like him, and it was cruel of her to question his love, to fail to help him when he sought with all kindness and consideration to find some hope in the future. They must part and it might be for the last time, but she would not send him away feeling that she had not appreciated all that his love had been and would continue to be to her. Without him, without some knowledge of his whereabouts and activities and the assurance of his well-being, life would be unbearable. She was all tender-

ness, all solicitude, wholly self-forgetful, as she softly uttered his name.

"Ward!" her arms found their way round his shoulders. "I'm selfish,—I was thinking that you taught me to love you only to thrust me away. But I know better, dear. You are dearer to me than anything in all the world—dearer than my life even and I know you mean to be kind. I know you want to do the right thing for both of us."

"Yes; yes!" he whispered eagerly and kissed her gently on lips and eyes. "If we truly love each other there will be some way. It was not of our ordering—any of this."

"Yes, we must believe that, dear! There can never be any man for me but you!"

"And no woman for me but you!"

They clung to each other, silent, fearing to utter even the reassuring and consoling words that formed on their lips. Beyond the river a train passed swiftly with a long blast of the locomotive.

They drew apart, listening till the whistle's last echo and the rumble of cars died away. Trenton sighed deeply. The disturbance had been an unwelcome reminder of the energies of the world of men hidden by the night. Grace was the first to speak.

"It's been so dear to have this hour! But, we mustn't meet again. Please don't ask me to see you—ever—not in any way. We'll both be happier if what we say tonight is final. We can't just begin over again and be friends. That would mean forgetfulness—and we can't forget. Please don't write me. I'm going to be all right. I'll be happy just thinking of you. We're both brave and strong and knowing that will help—won't it, dear?"

He knew that at the moment at least she was the

braver and stronger. He had nothing to add to what she had said. She rose and took his face in her hands and kissed him gently, passionlessly; passed her hands across his eyes, spoke his name softly. He neither spoke nor responded to her caresses.

"Come, dear!"

She touched his arm lightly and started down the path. He waited a moment before following.

She talked in a cheery tone of irrelevant things, laughed merrily when she lost the path; and so they came back to the garden where the lights of the house confronted them. At the veranda steps he caught her suddenly in his arms.

"It can't be like this! I'm not going to give you up! Tell me you understand that it's only for a little while——"

"We're not going to talk about it any more—" she said without a quaver—with even a little ring of confidence in her voice. But she suffered his kiss, yielded for a moment to his embrace.

"I'll love you always, always, always!" she said slowly.

"I'll love you till I die!" he replied. They stood with hands clasped for an instant, then she turned and ran into the house.

III

They had been gone more than an hour and the other members of the party stared at them as though they were intruders. Two of the men, not too befuddled by their potations to remember that they were leaving town by a midnight train, were trying to convince Kemp that it was time to go. Tommy was ex-

plaining elaborately that there were plenty of trains; that if there was anything the city was proud of it was the frequency with which trains departed for all points of the compass.

Irene in her disgust with Kemp for exceeding the limits she had fixed for his indulgence in the prized champagne had retired to the kitchen to talk to Jerry. Hearing Trenton's voice expostulating with Tommy she appeared, and announced that she was going home. One of the girls, overcome by champagne had retired and Irene went upstairs to see what could be done to restore her.

"Ask Jerry for some black coffee, Grace, that will fix her," said Irene.

She confided to Grace her indignation at the young woman for not behaving herself; she was disappointed in her. A girl, she declared, shouldn't go on a party if she hadn't any more sense than to get drunk. However, she ministered to the young woman effectively and kindly.

Trenton got the three visiting gentlemen and the young women who had accompanied them into a machine and dispatched them to town and resumed his efforts to persuade Kemp to go home. Kemp wished to discuss with Trenton his business plans for the future. He wanted Trenton to promise to move to Indianapolis immediately to assist him in the management of his plant. Finding Trenton unwilling to commit himself Kemp fixed his attention upon Irene. He became tearful as he talked of Irene. She was the most beautiful girl in the world, and she had brightened his life; he would always be grateful to her. And now that she had grown tired of what he called their little arrangement, he wanted her to be happy. He wished Trenton and Grace to bear witness that he bore no hard feeling but wished her well. If at any time Irene

needed help of any kind it would break his heart if she didn't appeal to him.

Finding that the others were impatient at the delay these deliverances were causing he assumed an injured air and bade them take him home. They didn't love him; nobody loved him. When finally they got him out to the big touring car he insisted that he would do the driving and this called for a long argument before he was dissuaded. He refused to enter the car at all until the others were settled in the back seat. He guessed he knew the demands of hospitality! Craig roused his ire by attempting to help him in and he waited till the chauffeur was seated and ready to start before he would move. Then he adjusted one of the disappearing seats, got in and began an ironical lecture on the instability of friendship. Some of his remarks were amusing and they encouraged him to go on feeling that so long as they manifested interest he would not revive the question of driving to the various points he had proposed as attractive places to run for breakfast. He announced suddenly that he had always wanted to visit the Tippecanoe Battle Ground and demanded an opinion from Craig as to how long it would take to drive there. He was irritated because the chauffeur professed not to know the route; he declared that he would get even with Craig for lying to him.

He became quiet presently and Trenton tried to interest him in a description of a mechanical stoker that had lately been put on the market.

"I mus' look into it," said Kemp. "Awfu' nice of you to tell me 'bout it, Ward."

Then before they knew what he was about he clutched the back of the front seat and threw one leg over. He swayed toward the driver and to steady himself grabbed the wheel.

Craig, believing Kemp wholly interested in Trenton's talk, was caught off guard. The car, which had been running swiftly over the smooth road, swerved sharply and plunged into the deep drainage ditch that paralleled the road. As the radiator struck the further side of the ditch Kemp was thrown forward and his head crashed against the windshield with terriffic force.

The three passengers on the back seat were pitched violently to the floor. Craig had shut off the motor instantly and jumped out, and when Trenton joined him in the road he was tearing off the curtains.

"Get your flash, Craig," Trenton said. But without waiting for the light he thrust in his arms and lifted Kemp out. Irene and Grace had crawled out and stood in the road clinging to each other and hysterically demanding to know what had happened to Tommy.

Craig jerked out the seat cushions and Trenton laid Kemp upon them. The flashlight showed Kemp's face deathly white and smeared with blood. Trenton was on his knees, his head against the stricken man's heart. He looked up with a startled awed look and shook his head.

"God!" he said under his breath.

"Oh, Ward! Not *that!*" faltered Irene, "Not——"

"No—No! We must keep our heads! Craig! What's the quickest way of getting help?"

"Ward—Oh, Tommy, Tommy!" cried Irene, dropping on her knees and taking Kemp's head in her arms.

"Don't Irene—don't!" moaned Grace helplessly.

"There's a house a quarter of a mile ahead where I can telephone," Craig said. "I know the farmer; you can rely on him."

"Just a minute," said Trenton, looking at his watch.

"There are things to consider. We've got to think of Tommy first of all. Craig, I can count on you ——?"

"Yes, certainly, sir. I'm afraid it was my fault; I ought to have been watching. But I thought——"

"You were no more to blame than I was. We can't discuss that now. We've got to take care of this in a way that will protect Tommy, and you girls mustn't figure in it at all."

"We understand all that; we'll do anything you say, Ward," sobbed Irene.

"I'm trying to think of some one we can trust to help," said Trenton. "There will be many things to do immediately."

"I wonder," said Irene turning to Grace, "whether we could reach John Moore."

"There's no one better!" Grace eagerly assented. "We could telephone him at his boarding house."

Trenton asked a few questions about Moore and began instructing Craig as to the persons he was to call by telephone; first a physician, who was also an intimate friend of the Kemps and two of Kemp's neighbors, well known to Trenton.

"Kemp and I had been to The Shack for dinner—alone—Jerry and the cateress must be taken care of as to that. Tommy was driving home. Something went wrong with the car and it ran off into the ditch. How about that, Craig?"

"I wouldn't say, Mr. Trenton, that Mr. Kemp was driving. The driver in such accidents is seldom hurt. We'd better say the car simply struck a stone and swerved."

Craig hurriedly suggested possible explanations of a deflection that would ditch a car at this point.

"Yes; that's better," Trenton agreed.

"If the young ladies could go into town on an interurban car that would help," said Craig. "It's only a little way to a stop on the crossroad back yonder. There'll be a car passing at half-past twelve."

These matters hastily determined, Craig hurried away, the quick patter of his feet on the macadam suggesting the flight of a malevolent fate that had struck its blow and was flying from the scene.

Tommy Kemp was dead. There was no question but that he had died instantly, either from the violent blow on the head or from a failure of the heart due to the shock of his precipitation against the windshield.

No cars had passed since the accident, but as they were on a highway Trenton urged Irene and Grace to go at once.

"You mustn't be seen here. It's horrible enough without having you mixed up in it."

Irene bent down and touched the quiet face, murmuring:

"It's cruel to leave him like this! Poor boy! Poor dear Tommy!"

IV

Grace and Irene had worn hats on the tragic adventure and their long dark cloaks covered their party dresses so that their entrance into the interurban car awakened little interest in the half-dozen dozing passengers. Fortunately Grace had her purse and paid the fares. The swift rush of the car exerted a quieting effect upon them. Irene had wrenched her shoulder when the machine leaped into the ditch, but Grace had escaped with only a few scratches. They conferred in low tones, still dazed by their close contact with death.

"I ought to have insisted on going home earlier. But I did the best I could. Tommy wouldn't budge. Tell me that I did the best I could!"

"Of course you did! We should never have gone—any of us!" said Grace. "I'm as much to blame as any one. But Tommy would have gone anyhow, you know he would."

"Ward's wonderful," said Irene. "I'll never forget him as he stood there beside Tommy as we left. Those men loved each other; and Tommy was *good,* Grace. I'm glad I had it out with him—about quitting I mean. He was sober then; perfectly all right. It was just before you and Ward came back that he began drinking crazily. When I told him I thought it was all wrong and that I wanted to quit he talked to me in the finest way. He said he wouldn't let me think I could be better than he was and he was going to live straight the rest of his life. But Tommy would never have quit. There would always have been some girl; and he just had to have his parties. I suppose there's no use worrying about that!"

"No," Grace consoled her, "things just have to be. You can't change anything. Ward and I said good-bye to each other tonight. So that's all over."

"I'm not so sure," Irene replied after a deliberate inspection of Grace's face. "I wouldn't count much on Ward giving you up. Love is a strange thing. You'll go on loving each other and breaking your hearts about it and then some day you'll meet and things will begin all over again. I've always been pretty cynical about these things, but I know love when I see it. It's——"

"Don't, Irene!" whispered Grace, a sob in her throat. "I can't bear it! To think of Tommy——"

Her hand stole out and clasped Irene's. The events

of the night had made upon both an impression that never could be effaced. Aware of this, silence held them until the lights of the station flashed upon the windows.

Moore was on the platform, and they found a quiet corner of the waiting room where Irene told the story of the accident. John expressed no surprise, made no criticism; merely said that he was proud that they had thought of him. Trenton had suggested that they ask Moore to visit the newspaper offices and then go to Kemp's house—Mrs. Kemp was still away—and notify the servants. John's practical mind had considered every aspect of the matter after his brief talk with Craig over the telephone and he had already dispatched the coroner to the scene of the accident that there might be no delay or subsequent criticism.

"The sooner you both get home the better," he said. "We'll decide now that you were both with me all evening. I'll account for my knowledge of the accident by explaining to the newspapers that Mr. Kemp's chauffeur called me on the telephone after trying to get Judge Sanders, who's Kemp's lawyer and an old friend. It happens that the judge left for Washington tonight. I think that covers it all."

It was not until Grace had crept into bed that she was able to think clearly. It was like a hideous dream that Kemp was dead—that she had seen him die. His death obscured the memory of her parting with Trenton, or blending with it, became a part of the dissolution of all things. Alone in the dark, remorse stole upon her like a nightmare. From the hour that she had met Kemp and Trenton a doom had followed her. In a few short months she had played havoc with her life. She groped back to her days at the University—happy days, they were; days of clean wholesome living and buoyant aspira-

tion. And she never could be the same carefree girl again.

It was not till near dawn that she slept, to be wakened by her mother a little before the prompting of the alarm clock.

"Something awful's happened, Grace. Thomas Kemp died last night, on the way home from his farm. There was an accident to his car but the paper says he died of heart disease. Mr. Trenton was with him. Your father's terribly upset; he doesn't know how it will affect his prospects. It's a strange part of it that only yesterday Kemp closed a deal for the purchase of the Cummings Company. The paper says he'd gone out to the farm with Mr. Trenton to talk over the merger."

It was necessary for Grace to hear Kemp's death discussed in all its bearings at the breakfast table. The talk was chiefly between her mother and Ethel, Durland merely confirming or correcting, when appealed to, their statements as to items of the dead man's history. They speculated fruitlessly as to the fate of Kemp's business interests, and how much he was worth and whether he had left large sums to charity.

Grace read the account of the accident and the long biographical sketch of Kemp while this was in progress. Trenton and Moore had managed the thing well. Trenton's statement as to the manner of his friend's death bore every mark of veracity, and it was fortified by the coroner's report and a statement from Kemp's physician.

"I suppose," remarked Ethel, "that Irene Kirby will be terribly shocked. It's a wonder she wasn't with him. They were always gadding about the country together. I'm relieved, Grace, that you weren't mixed up in this mess."

"Don't speak so to your sister, Ethel," admonished Mrs. Durland. "There are things about Mr. Kemp I never knew. It seems he gave large sums to some of our needy institutions and wouldn't let it be known. And he was beautiful to all his employees. It's not for us to say he wasn't a good man."

V

"Well," said Irene, the day after Kemp's funeral, "I hope Tommy knows all the fine things that have been said about him. I cried when I read about the poor people who went to his house just to look at him again—people he'd helped in their troubles for years, and you can be sure he always did it with a smile. I met Ward as I was coming down this morning. He was on his way to Judge Sanders's office and didn't see me till I spoke to him. You'd think he'd lost his own brother! He asked about you and said to tell you not to worry about anything. And he smiled in that wistful way he has. He said he might be kept here some time."

"Oh, I hope not!" Grace cried, and her eyes filled with tears.

She was already trying to accustom herself to the idea that they were never to meet again and the prospect of encountering him filled her with mingled hope and dismay. A few days later when Kemp's will was published her heart bounded as she read that the testator had appointed Trenton the managing trustee of Kemp's industrial enterprises, and that he would in all likelihood become a resident of Indianapolis. His picture was published, with a laudatory account of his career. The purchase of the

Cummings concern, which was consummated on the day of Kemp's death, greatly increased the responsibilities of the trustee, who was to serve for a period of ten years.

It was with confused sensations of happy pride and poignant heartache that Grace read all this. At home it was necessary constantly to play a part, to feign indifference as to Trenton's suddenly attained prominence, while her mother and Ethel reviewed daily all the potentialities of the situation as it affected Stephen Durland, who stolidly refrained from expressing any opinion as to what bearing Kemp's death might have on his personal affairs.

The complexities of her life seemed to Grace enormously multiplied. Trenton was there—in town—no doubt walking at times the streets she traversed going to and from her work, and she could not see him—must never see him again! If only the family affairs were less perplexing—Roy's future, clouded by his marriage, dominated all the domestic councils—she could leave; go where the remembrance of him would be less an hourly torture.

In combating her longing to see him she sought comfort in the thought that his new duties would help him to forget; and she wanted him to forget. With his nature he was sure to be profoundly affected by his friend's death and the confidence Kemp had reposed in him even from the grave. She found a certain luxury of sorrow in these thoughts; she wanted him to be happy, even if his happiness were to be won only by forgetting her.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

Miss Reynolds called Grace on the telephone a week after Kemp's death and with her usual kindly peremptoriness demanded that Grace dine with her the following night.

"I went away unexpectedly and didn't have a chance to let you know. I've got something I want to talk to you about—just you and me. Please come!"

Grace was ashamed not to manifest more cordiality in accepting the invitation but she was beset by fears lest Miss Reynolds was seizing the first possible moment to question her as to her singular conduct at the door on the afternoon when she had gone to the house with Trenton. And that seemed long ago, hidden by the black wall of an impenetrable past.

Miss Reynolds called for her at Shipley's at the closing hour and greeted her as though nothing had happened. She had been summoned to Baltimore on business, she explained. She talked in her brisk fashion throughout the dinner,—of impersonal matters, not mentioning the Trentons at all until they were settled in the living room.

"After all, I think I prefer plain bread-and-butter people—plain folks. A woman traveling with a maid and pretending to be keen about poor suffering humanity seems to me a good deal of a joke. Mrs. Trenton did one thing for me though and I ought to be grateful for that,—she sent me scampering back to the conservatives! I'd been just a little infected with some

of these new ideas, but after having that woman in my house two days and hearing her talk and seeing how fussy she is about her personal comfort, I'm for hanging on to the old fogy notions a while longer."

As Miss Reynolds continued her dissection of Mrs. Trenton's social program, Grace felt suddenly a strong impulse to tell her friend the whole story of her acquaintance with Trenton. In a way Miss Reynolds had a right to know. She waited, wondering how she could begin and what her friend would say, when Miss Reynolds said in her characteristically abrupt fashion:

"Look here, little girl, you've got something on your mind; you haven't been listening to me at all! You needn't be afraid of me; I'm a queer old person but sometimes I do understand. I wouldn't force your confidence; you know that,—but—why you dear *child!*"

Grace's eyes had filled with tears. Miss Reynolds crossed to her quickly.

"How clumsy I am! I wouldn't hurt you for worlds, dear!"

She sat down on a stool at Grace's feet and drew the girl's hands into her own.

"Poor dear heart," she murmured softly. "It's an awful big old world and little girls do sometimes get hurt—and lost. Maybe you'd like me to call the car and take you for a drive."

"No; I want to tell you; I've got to tell you. But I'm afraid if I do——"

"You couldn't tell me anything that would make me stop loving you," Miss Reynolds replied gently. . . .

Grace spared herself in nothing. She told the whole story, told it as a child might confess a grievous fault at a mother's knee, described the spirit of revolt

in which she had thought to ignore the old barriers, scorned the safeguards that had offered protection, exulted in her freedom. And now, appalled by the consequences of her treason she found herself defenceless, groping for the support of the very wall that she had contemptuously disregarded. Her day of rebellion was past; she was now eager to be received again into the ancient citadel.

"I think," she said finally, "that that's all."

Then for the first time Miss Reynolds looked up at her. Her eyes were wet.

"Dear little girl," she began and then was silent for a time, gently stroking the girl's hands.

"I guessed there was something wrong, of course," she went on, "when I met you in the hall that day. When I went in I saw right away that my interruption was unfortunate. But Mrs. Trenton very calmly introduced me to her husband. We talked a moment and he left. As he went out he merely bowed to her without saying anything. He struck me as being a gentleman—none of the look of a dissolute person, certainly a handsome man—a highbred look and air."

"Oh, tell me you saw the fineness, the nobility in him! I couldn't bear to have you hate him!"

"Why, no, I don't hate him. I'm only sorry for both of you! But—I don't think you quite understand—well, that as individuals we are responsible to those who have prior claims upon our consideration. For the sake of happiness to the greater number we must often give up our own happiness. Many beautiful and noble women have done that."

"Oh, I love him! I love him so!" moaned the girl.

"Yes, I believe you do, dear. It's pitiful—the whole thing. Be sure I feel for you; I want to help you."

Miss Reynolds rose and took a turn across the room.

"It's in his favor that he realized the thing couldn't go on; that for your sake it had to stop. That woman might easily ruin your life; and of course she has the right on her side."

"Yes,—yes, I know. I've no justification at all except—except—I love him."

"Yes, I understand. I believe you truly love him; but now its my business as your friend to urge you to forget. I realize that it won't be easy. It would simplify matters if you could go away,—see other people, develop new interests."

"Yes; I'd thought of that," Grace replied. "'But I can't leave home; there are difficulties; it wouldn't be kind."

"No; I understand that. But that brings me to the matter I asked you here to talk about. I want to equip a house which self-supporting young women can manage entirely by themselves with the fewest possible restrictions, not an institution—I hate the word—but a club. You notice I'm not smoking!" Miss Reynolds smiled. "Well, Mrs. Trenton cured me of that; she left me bored with the whole business of being an emancipated woman. I've got the idea that the house I propose can set a standard of morals and manners—something that will be good for the whole community. But there mustn't be a lot of restrictions. I want the girls who live there to use it as though it were their own home. I have every confidence that they'll make a happy household with just a little sympathy and encouragement, and," she smiled, "I hope—my example!"

"It's perfectly wonderful!" cried Grace. "And it's just like you!"

"Humph! It's perfectly selfish on my part; I expect to have a lot of fun getting it started; maybe the girls will let me dig in the garden now and then. There'll be a garden and tennis courts, and they must have a dance once a week, and I might drop in occasionally."

"Oh, they'll adore you!"

"Well, I don't mean to bother them. There are such houses in New York and Chicago and I'm going to visit them and get all the practical ideas I can before I say anything about it. I need some one to help me collect data and look after the thousand and one details of planning. We'll call it a secretaryship. Now, Grace," and Miss Reynolds beamed on her, "will *you* help me?"

"Why, Miss Reynolds!"

"It might be just what you need right now," Miss Reynolds went on, ignoring the girl's questioning, troubled look. "In fact, my dear child, you put the whole idea in my head by things you've dropped from time to time about the problems of young business women."

"But now—since you know——"

"Dear child, it's knowing that makes me all the more eager to have your help! It's only people who make mistakes and suffer that really understand. And we've got to have some heart in our club! So we'll call it settled and we'll go to New York two weeks from today and begin our work."

II

Grace's announcement at home that she was to leave Shipley's to become Miss Reynold's secretary

greatly pleased her mother, who saw in the change a social advancement. It was much more in keeping with her idea of the Durland dignity for a daughter of the house to serve a lady of wealth as secretary than to be selling ready-made-clothing. And Mrs. Durland hoped Grace would appreciate the privilege of becoming identified with so praiseworthy a philanthropy.

Ethel, possibly jealous of Miss Reynolds's growing interest in Grace, expressed at once her concern as to proper religious influences in the proposed club. She confessed to disappointment that Miss Reynolds had not manifested more interest in the girls' club in Dr. Ridgely's church. Miss Reynolds might very easily have given the church the benefit of the money she would spend on an independent work. It was not quite loyal, she thought, to the church and all it stood for; but she hoped the souls of the young women who lived in the club would be properly cared for and that Dr. Ridgely would be on the board; she favored strong boards to administer such institutions.

"There ain't goin' to be no board," Grace answered cheerily, "of the kind you mean. The girls are going to run the place themselves."

"Then it won't last long. I have no faith in such things."

"Better get some, Sis. Miss Reynolds knows what she's about. She's hoping others will follow her example and make a chain of such clubs."

Grace learned from her father that there had been no developments in the motor since Kemp's death; he didn't know where he stood, but Trenton had been encouraging as to the outcome. The reorganization made necessary by the absorption of the Cummings concern was causing the delay, Durland thought.

"Trenton's a busy man these days, but he's spent several evenings with me at the shop. He's a big man; he knows what he's about and he's been mighty fine to me."

"I'm glad of that, daddy. I'm sure Mr. Trenton would tell you if he didn't mean to go through with it."

"I think you're right, Grace. It's a little hard waiting—and I've done a lot of waiting in my time."

"You dear! We've got to believe the patient waiter gets the biggest tips—that's our slogan!"

She tapped him lightly on the shoulder as she spoke, keeping time to her words. He didn't know how his praise of Trenton had warmed her heart. The fact that he saw Trenton and no doubt would continue to meet him frequently gave her father a new interest in her eyes.

Grace saw Miss Reynolds every few days, and was finding relief and happiness in the prospect of her new work. Irene expressed the greatest satisfaction when Grace told her that she was leaving Shipley's.

"It's more in your line, Grace. And I certainly hand it to Little Old Ready-Money for having the sense to appreciate you. If she hadn't been the real goods she'd have backed away when you told her about Ward. Some woman, I say! It does sort of cheer things up to know there are people like that in the world. By the way, have you seen John lately?"

"Not since Tommy died."

"Well, there's another of the saints!" said Irene. "He's pretending now he doesn't know we were on a wild party and that he saved our reputations. He won't talk about it; not at all! So don't try to thank him. Tommy's estate is going through Sanders's office and John's no end busy. He's getting acquainted with Ward—funny how things work out! But if John

has any idea about you and Ward he never lets on. I thought you might like to know that."

"Well, he's probably done some thinking," Grace replied soberly; "John isn't stupid."

"He's my idea of a prince, if you ask me! He's making a big hit with my family; mother thinks he's the grandest young man who ever came up the pike. She's got him carrying all his mending and darning out to her to do and he's so nice to her I'm getting jealous!"

III

Roy came home for a week-end, but only after his mother had written him repeatedly urging a visit. He had really been at work—Mrs. Durland had this from the Dean of the Law School—but his enthusiasm for the profession his mother had chosen for him was still at low ebb. He wanted to find work on a newspaper; he wanted to go West; anything was preferable to setting up as a lawyer in an office of his own. It was disclosed that Mrs. Durland had arranged to mortgage the house to raise money with which to establish him. But it was the definite announcement of her purpose to bring Roy's wife home immediately after commencement, that the young couple might, as Mrs. Durland put it, begin their life together, that precipitated a crisis in Ethel's relations with her family.

The baby would be born in August and Mrs. Durland contended that the family dignity would suffer far less if Roy announced his marriage when he left the university and joined his wife in his father's house at Indianapolis.

Ethel was outraged by the plan. She would not live under the same roof with that creature; and she

availed herself of the opportunity to tell Roy what she thought of him. He had always been petted and indulged; his mother had favored him over the other children; they had all been obliged to practice the most rigid self-denial to educate him, and this was the result!

Roy surlily martyrized himself in meeting his sister's attack. He had never wanted to go to college; he hated the law and if it hadn't been for John Moore's stupid meddling he would have extricated himself from the scrape with the girl he had been forced to marry.

"I never thought you'd really do it, mother," Ethel moaned. "I didn't think you'd be cruel enough to visit this shame on me. Everybody will talk; we'll be ostracized by all our friends."

Grace's attempt to restore harmony only infuriated Ethel.

"I've told Osgood the whole story," Ethel announced. "I felt that was the only honorable thing to do and he's been splendid about it. We've been engaged since Easter and he's ready to marry me at any time. I'd hoped we'd be able to live at home for a little while, but now I'm going! I can already feel that abandoned creature in the house! Osgood has a good offer in Cincinnati and I'll marry him tomorrow and go away and never come back!"

"I would if I were you," said Grace, as Ethel stalked from the room. "Safety first! Grab all the life belts."

Ethel paused and pointed an accusing finger at Grace.

"You! You're a pretty one to talk!"

Stephen Durland raised his head, coughed and returned to his reading. Roy announced that he was go-

ing down town. The front door slammed upon him and Mrs. Durland burst into tears.

"You don't think—you don't think Ethel *means* she's going!"

"I certainly hope she means it," Grace replied wearily. "Osgood's not a bad fellow and maybe he can beat some sense into her."

IV

Grace had never been in New York before and Miss Reynolds gave her every opportunity to see the sights. The investigation of devices for housing business women Miss Reynolds pursued with her usual thoroughness, broadening her inquiry to include a survey of the general social effort in the metropolis. She accepted no invitations in which Grace could not be included, with the result that they dined or had luncheon in half a dozen private homes, and were entertained in fashionable restaurants and at the Colony Club.

"You're so good to me!" said Grace one night when they reached their hotel after a dinner at the house of some old friends of Miss Reynolds. "All the guests were somebody except me! I wonder what they'd think if they knew that only a little while ago I was Number Eighteen in Shipley's!"

"They knew you were good to look at," Miss Reynolds replied, "and talked well and had very pretty manners. Nothing else was any of their business."

"But sometimes—sometimes, Cousin Beulah, when your friends are so kind and treat me so beautifully, I can't help thinking that if they knew about me——"

"My dear Grace, this busy world's a lot kinder than it gets credit for being! Even if the world knew it wouldn't condemn you."

They had visited a settlement house on the East Side one morning and were driving to Washington Square for luncheon with a friend of Miss Reynolds who lived in one of the old houses which she said Grace ought to see.

"We're a bit early for our engagement," Miss Reynolds remarked as they reached Broadway. "We've got half an hour to look at Trinity."

They walked quickly through the yard, that Grace might experience the thrill of reading the historic names on the grave-stones, and entered the church. It was the noon hour and sightseers mingling with the employees from the towering buildings came and went. Miss Reynolds and Grace sat down in a pew near the door. A service was in progress and Grace, unfamiliar with liturgic churches, at once fixed her attention on the chancel. The minister's voice reciting the office, the sense of age communicated by the walls of the edifice, all had their effect on her. She felt singularly alone. The heartache that had troubled her little since she left home again became acute. Here was peace, but it was a peace that mocked rather than calmed the spirit. . . .

. . . "We humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men." . . .

The mournful cadence of the prayer only increased her loneliness. She was like a child who, watching night descend in a strange place, is overcome by a stifling nostalgia. Her throat ached with inexpressible emotions; her heart fluttered like a wild bird in her breast. She knew she wanted Trenton; nothing else mattered; no one else could ever fill his place. She bowed her head and her lips trembled.

A man walked hesitatingly down the aisle and slipped into a pew in front of her. Apparently he was

one of the many who were seeking relief from the world's turmoil. She remained motionless, staring. It was unbelievable that it could be Trenton; and yet beyond question it was he. His coming was like an answer to prayer. She recalled what he had written after his illness, that he had thought of her once so intently that he had brought her into the room. . . .

She remembered that he had once told her that his New York office was near Trinity. Perhaps it was his habit to drop in as he passed.

Miss Reynolds, turning the pages of a prayer book, evidently had not noticed, or had failed to recognize him. Presently she glanced at her watch, touched Grace's arm and nodded that it was time to go. As they paused in the entry to look at the bronze doors Grace decided not to tell her friend that Trenton was in the church; but suddenly he stood beside them.

"This is surely more than a coincidence," he said, smiling gravely as he shook hands. "I pass here every day but I hadn't been in before for years. But to-day——"

They walked together to the gate, Grace silent, Miss Reynolds and Trenton discussing the weather to cover their embarrassment. Grace, still awed by his appearance, saw that he looked careworn; even when he smiled at some remark of Miss Reynolds his eyes scarcely brightened.

"I have a taxi here somewhere." Miss Reynolds was glancing about uncertainly when the machine drew in at the curb.

"Are you staying in town long?" asked Trenton as he opened the cab door.

"Only a few days," Miss Reynolds replied guardedly. "Grace and I are here on a little business. I wonder——"

Without finishing the sentence she stepped into the car and gave the Washington Square address. Trenton rousing as he realized that they were about to leave him, bent forward and took Grace's hand.

"It's so good to see you!" he said steadily. "I'm going West tonight. Mrs. Trenton's been very ill; she's in a sanitarium in Connecticut." Then, aware that he couldn't detain them longer, "Miss Reynolds, I'm sure you and Miss Durland will take good care of each other!"

"Goodbye," said Grace faintly and watched him disappear in the crowd.

"I was going to ask him to come and dine with us," said Miss Reynolds when the car was in motion, "but I changed my mind. And now I wish I could change it again!"

"I'm glad you didn't," Grace answered colorlessly. "It would have been a mistake."

"Well, perhaps." And Trenton was not referred to again.

But all the rest of the day Grace lived upon the memory of his look, his voice. He was still in a world she knew; any turn of the long road might bring him in sight again.

V

A week in Chicago followed a fortnight in New York and Grace had filled a large portfolio with notes and pamphlets bearing upon Miss Reynolds's projected house for business girls. Her mother's letters had kept her informed of family affairs and she was prepared to find Ethel gone and Roy's wife established in the house. Ethel had refused to be married at home and the ceremony had been performed by

Dr. Ridgely in his study, with only Mrs. Durland present to represent the family. Ethel and Haley had left at once for Cincinnati, where they were to make their home.

"I did the best I could about it, Grace," Mrs. Durland kept repeating pathetically. "I hated to have her go that way, but she would do it. She said some pretty unkind things to your father after you left, and he didn't go to see her married."

For Sadie, the new member of the family, Grace formed an immediate liking. The girl was so anxious to be friendly and to do her share of the domestic labor and so appreciative of kindness that she brought a new element of cheer into the household. She was intelligent, and amusing, after a slangy fashion; even Stephen Durland laughed at her jokes.

Grace found that her position as secretary to Miss Reynolds was far from being a sinecure. She was present at all the conferences with the architect who had now been engaged, and when the announcement of the new club for business girls could no longer be deferred it fell to Grace's lot to answer the letters that poured in upon Miss Reynolds. A bedroom was fitted up as an office and there Grace spent half of every day, keeping accounts, typing letters and answering the importunities of the telephone.

One day in June Grace went to Judge Sanders' office on an errand for Miss Reynolds. It was merely a matter of leaving an abstract of title for examination, but as she was explaining what was wanted to the office girl John Moore came out of one of the inner rooms.

"Caught in the act!" he exclaimed. "I've just been hankering to see you. Can't you give me a few minutes, right now?"

She was really in a hurry, but when he earnestly protested that he had business with her she followed him into a room whose door bore the inscription: "Mr. Moore."

"That looks terribly important, John," she said indicating the lettering. "Onward and upward!"

"Well," he said, when they were seated. "Mr. Kemp's death has thrown a lot of business into the office and some of it that doesn't require much brain power they leave to me. Mr. Trenton just left a few minutes ago. He came in to see if I'd go down into Knox County to inventory a coal mine Kemp owned. I'm getting a lot of little jobs like that."

She smiled, as he wanted her to, at his boyish pride in his work. She derived a deep pleasure from the thought that Trenton had just been there. Trenton would appreciate John's qualities; they would appreciate each other's qualities and talents.

"Maybe you don't know," John went on, "and maybe I oughtn't to tell you; but right here on my desk are the papers for your father to sign away his rights in his motor patents and his formula for that non-breakable spark plug porcelain you probably know about. Your father's coming in tomorrow to sign up. Mr. Trenton has left a check here for advance royalties that will pay the Durland grocery bill for sometime to come!"

"Do you mean it, John! I'd been afraid Mr. Kemp's death would end all that."

"Trenton's the whole cheese in that business now and he knows what he's doing. He says those two things are bound to earn your father a lot of money."

"Father certainly deserves any success that may come to him. I'm so glad for him and mother—just

now when things at home don't look particularly bright."

"You're thinking of Roy? Well, Roy will get his law degree but that boy had no more business in the law than I'd have in a millinery shop. I sneaked him up here last Sunday and had Mr. Trenton take a look at him. You know Roy's a smart, likable chap, with a friendly way of meeting people and I thought maybe there was a job somewhere in the Kemp organization that he'd fit into."

"I don't know—" began Grace, doubtfully, remembering Roy's anger at John's meddling.

"Oh, Roy took it fine! Mr. Trenton's taken a fancy to him; in fact they liked each other immensely. Roy's to get his sheepskin and then go right into the Kemp factory for six months to get an idea of the business and then transfer to the sales department."

"Why, John, that's wonderful!" exclaimed Grace. "You don't *know* how relieved I am."

"You're not half as relieved as Roy is to dodge the law," John chuckled. "That boy will make good. I'd told Mr. Trenton all about him and he was as kind to him as a father. Roy wanted me to ask you to spring the news on his mother. She's so keen about having him a lawyer that he's afraid to tell her himself."

"Yes, John; I'll do it tonight. And thank you! Oh, thank you for everything!"

VI

Stephen Durland's announcement that the Kemp Company had taken up the option on his motor and

made a contract for the manufacture of the porcelain tempered in some degree his wife's disappointment when Grace broke the news that Roy had renounced the law. Mrs. Durland took comfort in the fact that Roy had really passed the law examinations and was admitted to practice with the rest of his class. This measurably satisfied her family pride by enrolling Roy on the list of attorneys of his state in succession to his grandfather and great-grandfather. Roy, however, was much less thrilled by this than by the prospect of having at once employment that he felt was within his powers. The idea of making machinery had never interested him, but the idea of selling it appealed to him strongly and for the first time in his life he found himself in sympathy and accord with his father.

Stephen Durland had money in the bank and was reasonably sure of a good income for the remainder of his life. The Kemp publicity department had given wide advertisement to his discoveries, and several technical journals had asked for photographs of the inventor, the taking of which Grace joyfully supervised. A kind fate having intervened to prevent the mortgaging of the old home Mrs. Durland was now considering selling it and satisfying the great desire of her heart by moving beyond the creek.

Ethel, hearing of the family's unexpected prosperity, had been up for a visit, and returned to Cincinnati with a supply of linens for her apartment. Her mother thought it only fair that she should participate in the good luck that had at last overtaken the Durlands and Grace agreed with her. Haley's earnings were meager and Ethel received the gift graciously. She even volunteered a few generous words to her young sister-in-law, about whom she admitted she might have been mistaken.

Durland declined to become interested in the proposed change of residence. In fact he continued to appear dazed by his good fortune and Grace, for years familiar with his moods, was mystified by his conduct.

One evening when they were alone on the front porch she asked a question about affairs at the factory, really in the hope that he would speak of Trenton. When he had answered perfunctorily that everything was running smoothly and that they would be ready to put the new motor on the market in six months he remarked that Trenton was away a good deal.

"His wife's sick, you know; down East somewhere. I guess he's had a good deal to worry him. When he's in town he works hard. There's a lot to do moving the stuff from Cummings's old plant, and putting up the new buildings."

"Mr. Trenton's certainly been a good friend to you, daddy. But of course he wouldn't have taken your patents if they hadn't been all they promised to be."

Durland turned his head to make sure they were not overheard. Mrs. Durland was somewhere in the house and Roy and Sadie had gone for a walk. Durland cleared his throat and said in a low tone:

"I'd never have got those things right, Grace. Trenton straightened me out on a lot o' points that were too much for me. He worked with me every night for a week till everything came right. He oughtn't to give me the credit."

"Now, daddy, that's just like you! Of course, they're all your ideas! But it was fine of Mr. Trenton to help you round them out."

"It was more than that, Grace," Durland persisted stubbornly.

This, then, was the cause of her father's preoccupation and the embarrassment with which he had been hearing himself praised. It was Trenton's genius, not his, that had perfected the motor! Something sweet and wistful like the scents of the summer night crept into her heart. She was happy, supremely happy, in the thought that Trenton had done this, given her father the benefit of his skill, and for her. Yes; it was all for her, and for those close and dear to her. But her father's confession moved her greatly. The light from the window fell upon his hand, which seemed to her to symbolize failure as it hung inert from the arm of his chair.

"Oh, lots of inventors must accept help from experts, when they've got as far as they can by themselves. Don't you worry about that! I'm sure it was a pleasure to Mr. Trenton to help you over your difficulties. He naturally wouldn't want any of the credit when you did all the real work."

Durland shook his head impatiently.

"I couldn't have done it!" he said huskily. "I don't understand even now how he got the results he did!"

"Oh, pshaw!" she exclaimed with a happy little laugh. "No man would be so generous of his talents as all that; men are not built that way."

But she knew that it was true, and that it was because Trenton loved her that he had saved her father from another and crushing failure.

VII

She was able to keep track of Trenton's movements through Irene, who got her information from John. Grace and Trenton were holding strictly to their

agreement not to see each other. Once, as she waited for the traffic to break at Washington and Meridian Streets, Trenton passed in a car. Craig was driving and Trenton, absorbed in a sheaf of papers, didn't lift his head. He was so near for a fleeting second that she could have touched him. This, then, was to be the way of it, their paths steadily diverging; or if they met it would be as strangers who had ceased to have any message for each other.

Sadie's baby was born in August and Roy manifested an unexpected degree of paternal pride in his offspring. The summer wore on to September. Now and then as she surveyed herself in the mirror it seemed to Grace that she was growing old and that behind her lay a long lifetime, crowded with experience. She felt herself losing touch with the world. Miss Reynolds, with all her kindness, was exacting. Grace saw no young people and her amusements were few. Irene, who watched her with a keenly critical eye, remarked frequently upon her good looks, declaring that she was growing handsomer all the time.

"You won't really reach perfection till you're forty," said Irene, "and have some gray in your raven tresses. I'll look like a fat yellow cucumber when I'm forty!"

Unless all signs failed Irene and John were deeply in love with each other—the old story of the attraction of apparently irreconcilable natures.

"I've told John everything—all about Tommy, of course, to give him a chance to escape," Irene confided. "But I didn't jar him a bit. That man's faith would make a good woman of Jezabel. John's already got some little jobs—secretaryships of corporations that Judge Sanders threw his way. He thinks we can be married early next year and I'm studying real estate ads. I've got enough money to make a pay-

ment on a bungalow as far from Shipley's as a nickel will carry me and there'll be a cow and a few choice hens. Back to nature for me, dearie!"

"Oh, it's just marvelous!" cried Grace. "You and John are bound to reach the high places. You've got just the qualities John needs to help him get on. When he goes into politics after while you'll be a big asset."

"I think I might like a few years in Washington," Irene replied meditatively. "I've already joined up with a woman's political club to learn how to fool 'em all the time!"

"Isn't that just like you!"

"But, Grace——"

"Yes; Irene."

"I love John." Irene's eyes filled with tears. I've talked so much foolish nonsense to you about men, and you must have thought me hard and sordid. I wouldn't want you to think I married John just to escape from myself. He's the grandest man in the world, and I'd die before I'd injure him, or cause him a second's heartache. You do believe that, don't you?"

"Yes; and it's dear and beautiful. I'm so glad for both of you! I hope—I know, you will be happy!"

A few days later Grace met John in the street and he turned and walked with her a little way.

"I guess Irene's told you? Well, I want to tell you, too!" he said with his broadest smile.

"Well, I didn't need to be told, John! I saw it coming. And I congratulate you both with all my heart."

"Yes; I knew you'd be glad, Grace," he said; then his face grew grave. "You see Irene was troubled a lot—well about little mistakes she'd made. She was mighty fine about that. When I found I loved her

and she loved me, nothing else made any difference. And she's so strong and fine and splendid you just know it was never in her *heart* to do wrong!"

"Yes, John," Grace replied, touched by his simple earnestness, his fine tolerance, his anxiety that she should know that Irene had withheld nothing of her past that could ever cast a shadow upon their happiness.

Late in September Miss Reynolds proposed to Grace that they go to Colorado to look at the mountains. The architect could be relied on to watch the construction of the club house and Miss Reynolds insisted that Grace had earned a vacation.

They established themselves in a hotel that commanded a view of a great valley with snowy summits beyond and Grace tramped and rode and won a measurable serenity of spirit. Miss Reynolds may have thought that amid new scenes the girl would forget Trenton, but the look that came into Grace's eyes at times discouraged the hope. Then one evening, as they sat in the hotel office reading their mail Miss Reynolds laid a Denver newspaper on Grace's knee and quietly pointed to a headline: "Death of Mary Graham Trenton."

The end had come suddenly in the sanatarium where Mrs. Trenton had been under treatment. Her husband, the dispatch stated, was with her when she died.

"She seemed ill when she was at my house," remarked Miss Reynolds; "she was frightfully nervous and seemed to be constantly forcing herself. That tired look in her eyes gave the impression of dissipation. I'm ashamed to say it but I really thought she might be addicted to drugs."

"I'm sorry," Grace murmured, numbed, bewildered

by the news. She had never taken the reports of Mrs. Trenton's illness seriously, believing Ward's wife was feigning illness to arouse her husband's pity—perhaps in the hope of reawakening his love. It had never occurred to her that she might die.

As soon as possible Grace excused herself and went to her room, where she flung herself on the bed and lay for a long time in the dark, pondering. In spite of their agreement not to write she had hoped constantly to hear from him; and his silence she had interpreted as meaning that he had found it easy to forget. She now attributed his silence to the remorse that had probably assailed him when he found that Mrs. Trenton was hopelssly ill.

VIII

Grace had been home a week when she received a letter from Trenton, written in Pittsburgh. He was closing up his home; looking after the settlement of Mrs. Trenton's estate. She had bequeathed her considerable property to the societies for social reform in which she had been interested. He hoped to be in Indianapolis shortly, he wrote, and continued:

. . . "My thoughts in these past weeks have not been happy ones; but I must turn now to the future. In my dark hours I have groped toward you, felt the need of your leading hand. I love you. That is the one great fact in the world. Whatever I have left to me of life is yours; and it is now my right to give it. . . . It was my fate, not my fault, that I learned to love you. Nothing can change that. Let me begin over again and prove my love for you—

win you as it is a woman's right to be won, in the world's eyes. I want you to bear my name; belong to me truly, help me to find and keep the path of happiness."

She did not understand herself as the days passed and she felt no impulse to reply. She loved him still —there was no question of that—but she tortured herself with the idea that he had written only from a chivalrous sense of obligation. Trenton was free; but she too was free; and marriage was an uncertain quantity. She encouraged in herself the belief that to marry him would be only to invite unhappiness. While she was still debating with herself, she learned from Irene that Trenton was again in town and working hard.

The new club for business girls, which Miss Reynolds decided to name Friendship House, was in process of furnishing and was to be opened on Thanksgiving Day.

Nothing in the preparations had proved so embarrassing as the choice of the first occupants. It might have seemed that all the young women in town were clamoring for admission and only fifty could be accommodated. Miss Reynolds and Grace spent many hours interviewing applicants. Then, too, there was the matter of working out a plan for the general management of Friendship House until the club members took hold of it for themselves.

"The girls can make their own rules," said Miss Reynolds. "But I'm going to have one little rule printed and put in every room and worked into all the doormats and stamped into the linen—just two words—Be Kind! If we'd all live up to that this would be a lot more comfortable world to live in!"

Being so constantly at Miss Reynolds's Grace had heard the Bob Cummingses mentioned frequently. The merger had obliterated the name from the industrial life of the city; the senior Cummings had gone West to live with his eldest son and Miss Reynolds had spoken frequently of the plight in which the collapse of the family fortunes had left Bob. Evelyn came in one morning when Grace was alone in the improvised office.

"We've sold our house," she announced, after they had talked awhile. "It was mine, you know; a wedding present from my uncle. And I've got about a thousand a year. So I'm going to turn Bob loose at his music. He's already got a job as organist in Dr. Ridgley's church and he's going to teach and do some lecturing on music. He can do that wonderfully."

"That's perfectly splendid!" said Grace warmly. "But it's too bad—the business troubles. I've wanted to tell you how sorry I am."

"Well, I'm not so sure any one ought to be sorry for us. Our difficulties have brought Bob and me closer together, and our chances of happiness are brighter than on our wedding day; really they are! I'm saying this to you because you know Bob so well, and I think you'll understand."

Grace was not sure that she did understand and when Evelyn left she meditated for a long time upon the year's changes. She had so jauntily gone out to meet the world, risking her happiness in her confidence that she was capable of directing her own destiny; but life was not so easy! Life was an inexorable schoolmaster who set very hard problems indeed!

Irene, pretending to be jealous of Miss Reynolds,

declared that there was no reason why Grace, in becoming a philantrophist should forget her old friends. This was on an afternoon when Grace, in Shipley's to pick up some odds and ends for Friendship House, looked into the ready-to-wear floor for a word with Irene.

Hard-pressed to defend her neglect she accepted an invitation to accompany Irene and John to a movie that night.

"John will have to work for an hour or so but we can get in for the second show. You just come up to Judge Sanders' office about eight and we can have an old-fashioned heart-to-heart talk till John's ready. You never take me into your confidence any more," she concluded with an injured air.

"I don't have any confidences; but if I had you certainly wouldn't escape."

"You're not seeing, Ward, I suppose?" Irene asked carelessly.

"No," Grace replied with badly feigned indifference. "I haven't seen him and I have no intention of seeing him again."

"I suppose it's all over," said Irene stifling a yawn.

"Yes, it's all over," Grace replied testily.

"Strange but Ward just can't get that idea! Of course he's had a lot to do and think about but he'd never force himself on you."

"No; he wouldn't do that," Grace assented.

"Ward's a free man," said Irene dreamily. "He'll probably marry again."

"Irene! It was silly of me to be as crazy about him as I was. That freedom I used to talk about was all rubbish. We can't do as we please in this world,—you and I both learned that! And after—

well—after all that happened I could never marry Ward. And it would be a mistake for him to marry me—a girl—who——"

"Grace Durland!" Irene interrupted with lofty scorn, "you are talking like an idiot! You're insulting yourself and you're insulting Ward. I know a few things. He telephoned you at Miss Reynolds's twice and asked to see you and you refused. Don't let Miss Beulah Reynolds intimidate you! She took you to Colorado hoping you'd forget Ward!"

"Miss Reynolds is perfectly fine!" Grace flared. "She's never said a word against Ward!"

"Oh, she wouldn't need to say it! She's just trying to keep you away from him. I'm not knocking Beulah—she's all right; but when there's a man in the world who is eating his heart out about you, you just can't stick your nose in the air and pretend you don't know he's alive."

Grace had been proud of her strength in denying Trenton the interview for which he had asked; but she left Irene with an unquiet heart. Trenton was lonely, and his letter had been written in a fine and tender spirit. She knew that she was guilty of dishonesty in trying to persuade herself that the nature of their past association made marriage with him impossible. He had said nothing that even remotely suggested this. On the other hand he had declared plainly that sooner or later he would have her, meaning, of course, through marriage. She despised herself for her inconsistencies. She had told him that she loved him; love alone could have justified their relationship; and yet she was viewing him in the harshest light without giving him the hearing for which he had asked at the earliest moment possible.

IX

She looked forward eagerly to the promised talk with Irene and after supper she hurried down town and was shot upward in the tall office building. She found Irene and John sitting opposite each other at a large flat top desk. Irene was helping John to compare descriptions of property but she would be free in a moment. He showed Grace into the big library and laughingly gave her a law magazine to read, saying it was the lightest literature the place afforded.

The dingy volumes on the shelves impressed her with a sense of the continuity of law through all the ages. She glanced idly at the titles, Torts, Contracts, Wills, Injunctions,—there must, in this world, be order, rule and law! Life, nobly considered, was impossible without law. It was the height of folly that she had ever fancied herself a rebel, confident of her right to do as she pleased. She had made her mistakes; henceforth she meant to walk circumspectly in the eyes of all men. She envied Irene her happiness with John; as for herself, love had brought her nothing but sorrow and heartache.

Her speculations were interrupted by the rustle of papers in the adjoining room. The door was half ajar and glancing in she saw a man seated at a desk, busily scanning formidable looking documents and affixing his signature.

Absorbed in his work he was evidently unaware that he was observed. Her heart beat wildly as she watched him. She stifled a desire to call to him; checked an impulse to run to him. Irene had played a trick upon her in thus bringing her so near to Trenton! She wondered whether he had seen her and

was purposely ignoring her. Or, he might think she had suggested this to Irene. Her face burned; she would escape somehow. As she watched him he lifted his head with a sigh, threw himself back wearily in his chair and stared at the wall. No; she would not speak to him; never again would she speak to him. Panic-stricken she turned and began cautiously tip-toeing toward the hall door with no thought but to leave the place at once.

But, the door gained, her heart beat suffocatingly; she could not go; she did love him, and to run away—

She stole into the room without disturbing his reverie, and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"I couldn't go—I couldn't leave you—"

Then she was on her knees beside him, looking up into his startled eyes.

He raised her to her feet, tenderly, reverently, gazing eagerly into her face.

"How did you know?" he cried, his eyes alight.

"I didn't know; it just happened. I—I saw you—and I just couldn't run away!"

"Oh, say that again! I've missed you so! You can't know how I've missed and needed you!"

"Do you—do you love me," she asked softly, "as you used to think you did?"

"Oh, more—more than all the world!"

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